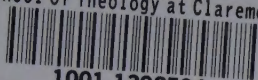


School of Theology at Claremont



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CHRIST:

And other Sermons.

BY THE

REV. GORDON CALTHROP, M.A.,

Vicar of St. Augustine's, Highbury, and
Prebendary of St. Paul's Cathedral.



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REV. GORDON CALTHROP, M.A.,

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SECOND EDITION.

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PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION.

THE Sermons here printed were preached in the ordinary course of the author's ministry, and, with one exception, in his own church. There is nothing special about them—except the circumstance that they have been found to interest, perhaps to profit, some of those who heard them : and the other circumstance, that they are published for the benefit of the Operative Jewish Converts' Institution. In this latter fact lies their chief claim to regard : and should the publication of the little volume be found to have advanced the interests of one of the most valuable of the institutions connected with the great Jewish cause, the writer will be very thankful—and so will others.

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.

A Second Edition having been called for, I have made a few changes, chiefly of the most trifling kind.

G. C.

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I.

IN CHRIST.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.”—ROMANS viii. 1.

N three out of the four Gospels, we have the story of the paralytic, whom Jesus healed on His return to the town of Capernaum. You remember it, of course. The three narratives are very much alike, and in each of them especial stress is laid on the circumstance that the poor sufferer received the assurance of the forgiveness of his sins before the burden of his bodily ailment was taken away. The fact is, that the man's troubles had brought the iniquities of his past life to remembrance, and made him more anxious to be pardoned than he was to be healed. Perhaps—I do not know—he hardly expected the spiritual blessing: that might seem to be out of his reach; but, so strong was the confidence with which the loving and powerful personality of Jesus had inspired him, that he found no difficulty in rising to the belief that he was a forgiven man as soon as the words of absolution dropped from the Saviour's lips. It was enough that the wonderful Prophet of Galilee—the representative of the living God—had spoken the words; and not a shadow of doubt crossed the man's mind, even

before he found himself able to get up from the mattress, and to take it on his shoulders, and to carry it off to his home.

But this unhesitating simplicity of faith, Christian brethren, is not always to be met with amongst mankind. Under different circumstances, it is quite conceivable that even well-disposed persons—conscious of their need of divine pardon—might be tempted to ask questions on the subject. In a spirit—not like that of the Scribes and Pharisees spoken of in the narrative—but of true and legitimate anxiety, they might say: “*Who* is this who undertakes to bestow, or to assure us of, forgiveness? Is He really authorised to make the announcement? Is it not possible that He may be mistaken? And if He be not mistaken—what are the conditions on which forgiveness is extended to one like me, who has sinned against the holy law of God?” For, when we are leading careless and indifferent lives, it troubles us very little, if at all, that we should be under the curse of a violated law. But, when we wake up to the realities of our position—and this, as you know, is effected by the touch of the Holy Spirit upon our souls—then there wake up also in us moral perplexities, which have to be encountered and disposed of—perplexities which might perhaps be simply, but with sufficient accuracy, expressed in the interrogation: “How can God, being what He is—treat me, being such as I am—as if I had not sinned?”

This, brethren, is a difficulty for thoughtful men; and the Apostle Paul grapples with it in those chapters of the Epistle which precede our text. In the text itself we have the conclusion of the argument. And what is it? That they, for whom there is no condemnation, although they have broken the law of God, and broken it, in number-

less particulars, they, from whose souls the pressure of the divine wrath has been lifted off, and who are provided with a sufficient answer, because they have a sufficient Advocate in the dreadful day of judgment,—are the men and women who have sheltered themselves in Christ, the Son of God's love—and, who show that they have done so, by “walking not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” We have here, obviously, a subject of some interest and importance opening out before us. Let us advance to consider it.

We will put ourselves, if you do not mind, back in the enquiry. We have the Apostle's decision before us—I have just described it to you. But let us suppose that we have not yet heard and accepted it, but that we are anxiously groping our way to a satisfactory conclusion on the subject of the forgiveness of our sins.

It is clear, then, that we have a revelation of God's *wrath against sin*—against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. We have it in our conscience. For, to say nothing about gross sins, and open vices, which carry their own condemnation stamped upon them—what is the meaning of that feeling of uneasiness, of unrest, of apprehension, which occasionally, at least, passes like a spectre over our hearts, if we have not surrendered our will to Christ's will, but have persistently thrust away from us the offer of His great salvation? Why, it is, of course, the startled consciousness of having an unsettled controversy with God. It is the shadow of the cloud of impending judgment. Then we have the revelation, in the history of the human race. It would seem hardly possible, in the face of those tremendous judgments—of which Holy Scripture informs us—to regard the Great

Ruler of the Universe as a meek, gentle, kindly Being, whose chief attribute is an easy-going good nature. Is God not righteous, as well as kind? Will He not execute vengeance against those who persistently and permanently oppose themselves to His authority? Let the deluge of Noah answer—as it rolls its deep, dark waters over the homes of the inhabited globe, and leaves not a single creature breathing, except those who have taken refuge in the ark. Let the reply come from the doomed Cities of the Plain—when the fiery hail streams down from Heaven upon them, and sweeps their pollution from amidst the children of men; or, from Jerusalem itself, which, forty years after the crucifixion of Christ, suffered the untold horrors and agonies of the Roman siege, as a retribution for the commission of that tremendous crime. Was not the Prophet Daniel right when, in view of all that his people had undergone in their Babylonian captivity, he spoke of Jehovah as being “great and dreadful?” And, oh! if this be so, think what it would be for any one of us to discover, when he passes behind the veil, that he has all his life been living in “a fool’s paradise” and been unconscious of the true state of his soul. Think what it would be to discover that you have been under condemnation—a criminal sentenced to death, without being aware of it; that you have been laughing and singing and amusing yourself; or, it may be, immersed in the cares of the world,—whilst all the while the heavy wrath of God on account of unpardoned sin was hanging up over your head, ready to fall and crush you; and that now the consequence is that you have to appear, with no atonement for transgression—with no plea for acceptance—with no righteous-

ness to shelter you—with no fitness of soul for the stern conditions of eternity—before the keen, searching, torturing blaze of the judgment-seat of a just and holy God!

It is such considerations as these, brethren, which make men ask how they can hope to escape condemnation? or (to repeat an expression I used a moment or two ago), how God can deal with them, as if they had never been guilty of sin? The enquiry is a sufficiently important one for all of us. Let us consider two kinds of answer to it : first, those which man gives ; second those, or rather, that which God gives.

I.—It is the impression, then, with some that we may escape divine condemnation, by so multiplying our good deeds as that they shall exceed in amount and value our sins and shortcomings. God, it is supposed, keeps an account of all that we think, or speak, or do, and strikes a balance at last, assigning our portion, according to the preponderance of good over evil, or of evil over good. According to this view, we may set off one thing against another—a rigorous observance of Lent, for instance, against a life of worldliness and dissipation for the rest of the year ; long prayers, or listening to long sermons, against the outpourings of a backbiting and slanderous tongue ; a gift to a charity, against overreaching in business ; an act of kindness, against an act of impurity : and we may hope in this way to obtain an ultimate acquittal at the judgment-seat. And not an uncommon form of the theory is to be found when a man persuades himself that he will soon reform his life, and that, for the sake of that reformation, God will be good enough to overlook all that has been amiss in the past.

But, brethren, when we come to think of it, no sensible

person—no person who really and earnestly looks into the matter—can possibly be deceived by such theories as these. I speak to business-men here: men shrewd, practical, clear-headed, not easily taken in. Will any number of *bad* threepenny pieces rise to the value of a sovereign? Of course not. How, then, can our deeds, which—unless they are done from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the help of His Holy Spirit—will not pass current in the courts of the upper sanctuary, how can they, base coin as they are, have any efficacy whatever in recommending us to God, and in obtaining for us a footing in the divine favour? Once more: if I have incurred a debt, and payment is demanded of me, shall I be able to release myself from liability by engaging to pay ready-money to my creditor for the future? “Of course not,” is everybody’s answer. Apply the answer to spiritual things. Suppose that I could do such a thing as to engage to live a faultless, sinless life—like that of Jesus Christ—for the rest of my days (the thing is impossible, of course, but let us suppose it), I should even then do no more than it was my duty to do; and how is the past debt which I have incurred—the debt of sin, the debt of innumerable violations of the law of God—to be cancelled and done away with? Even on the extreme supposition which I have just made, the debt remains exactly where it was before.

But we have another impression to deal with. It is thought that the Fatherhood of God settles the matter. “As a father deals with a child” (men say), “so God deals with us sinners. He simply forgives, without demanding anything like satisfaction or atonement. There is no condemnation, because He pardons, and we, on our part, accept

the pardon ; and that is all." But I suspect that there are not a few amongst us, whose consciences—if fully aroused to the nature and the danger of sin—would most emphatically refuse to be satisfied with such an explanation as this. It is true that God is a Father ; and "Father" is His highest, as well as His most engaging and attractive, title ; but, because He is a Father, He has not abdicated His throne, and ceased to be a lawgiver and a judge. And if He is a lawgiver, attaching penalties, as a lawgiver must do, to every act of disobedience to His will, why should we not reason up from the laws of man to the laws of God ? Is it wise—is it right—to put a difference between them which, after all, may not exist ? Is God only a nominal lawgiver, and not a lawgiver in reality ? Now, we know how it is with human legislation. If I offend against the laws of my country, no amount of expressions of regret—no promises of amendment, however sincere—will avail to relieve me from the consequences which I have incurred. The judge will tell me that he has no power to remit the penalty. Ay, and if for years—for long years—I have played the part of an honest and a creditable citizen, whilst all the while—in the far background of my life—there lies a great offence which has not yet come to light, I am still as liable to punishment as I was at the time when the crime was committed ; and I know perfectly well—for I do not deceive myself *about the law of man*—that, should the fact be discovered and proved against me, my subsequent excellence of conduct will leave me nothing else than a detected criminal in the grasp of inexorable and unsparing justice. Why, then, should I deceive myself about the law of God ? Is there such a difference between human law and divine law, that I should

expect remission in the one case, and not in the other? And when I can see so plainly that a readiness to relax incurred penalty, and an unwillingness to inflict deserved suffering would introduce the most frightful disorder and confusion into human affairs, and make social life almost an impossibility by confounding right with wrong—why should I not anticipate the very worst results, if I found that at the head of affairs, in a boundless universe, there was a Being who professed to love righteousness and to hate iniquity, who uttered the most terrible denunciations against wrongdoing—but who, when the pinch came, was too easy-going, too tender-hearted, too soft to inflict the punishment which He had so loudly and so incessantly threatened?

So, brethren, on consideration, we put aside the second “impression” (as I have called it), that based on the Fatherhood of God. It may do for the fairweather of our human existence. It will fail us in the dark moments of sorrow or of spiritual anxiety. Especially will it fail us when the end draws near, and the past, with all its eager cares and pleasures begins to lie behind us like a dream, and we feel ourselves to be within a few steps of the dread realities of the eternal kingdom.

II.—But, passing away from man’s ideas, let us consider *God’s* reply to the enquiry about forgiveness. “There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.”

Now, we may picture to ourselves the Saviour in the midst of His Church—as He stood in old Galilean days amongst the thousands, feeding them with a handful of food—and we may imagine Him distributing to each of His disciples according to his need—reaching out forgiveness, peace strength, knowledge—in fact, all the conceivable

blessings and privileges of the spiritual life. And the picture, no doubt, would represent—with a certain amount of accuracy—the facts of the case. But it would not be all that is required. Rather are we led to conceive of each true disciple as being united—made one with his Master, by a living faith, a faith imparted to and sustained in him by God the Holy Ghost. To help us in the conception, let us turn for a moment to Bible-imagery. We are, all of us, connected with Adam—the root of our race; and to that connection we owe our liability to sin, and our exposure to the doom of death. “In Adam all die.” But, precisely in the same way (it is a real and not a figurative way), we—if we are true disciples—are connected with Jesus Christ, the second and last Adam, and draw from Him the blessing of eternal life. Again, in the tree and its branches—the branch, being part of the tree, and, only on such condition, becoming capable of bearing fruit; in the intimate union between the Head and the members of the body—those members being under the guidance and direction of the Head, and deriving life and the power of motion from it—in these things, not to mention others which will occur to you, we have a lively and graphic representation of the union of the soul by the power of the Holy Spirit with the God-Man Himself—a union so close and intimate, that Christ is said to abide in us, and we are said to abide in Him; He to be one with us, and we to be one with Him.

You have heard, of course, of the “imputation” of Christ’s righteousness to us—a phrase which some have objected to, as implying an unreal transaction. For myself, I have no quarrel with the phrase. It is Scriptural. St. Paul speaks of “the blessedness of

the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works." It places us, too, at a certain important angle of the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. But the thoughts suggested by the expression "in Christ," are not so open to the charge of unreality. They suggest a mystery, of course; but it is a mystery which is also a spiritual fact. It is by virtue of the organic oneness, established between the Christian and Christ, that we become actually participants in what Christ does, and what Christ is. It is because what affects the Head, of necessity affects the members of the body also (if they are living members), that we have a share in the death of Christ, and are, therefore, freed from condemnation, because He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself; and a share in the resurrection-life of Christ, by which we die daily unto sin, and rise again unto righteousness. Of course, there must be, in the matter, our own consent. We must make what Christ has done our own, by our cordial acceptance of it as something done for us; by our true sympathy with it, shown in the honest endeavour to realise our union with the Lord.

In this way, brethren, we escape condemnation: not by overlaying our bad deeds by good ones, however well-meant and earnest; not by casting ourselves vaguely on God's supposed incapacity of punishing; but simply by accepting—in the power of the Spirit—Christ's gracious and loving offer of identification with Himself. "In Christ" we are safe—and *only* in Christ.

Let me close with a simple illustration. Your soul is like a dove, or some other feeble bird, and the law of God, which you have broken, is like a bird of prey, with fierce eye, with cruel beak and talons, swooping on its broad, strong pinions

after you, to take your life. What chance of escape have you? None! In vain, all your activity—in vain, all your twists and turns; you must soon be overtaken by your foe and torn to pieces. Did I say there was no way of escape? I made a mistake. There is one—only one. A rock rises up before you—a rock with crevices and fissures—a cleft rock: the Rock of Ages, cleft to be a refuge for your soul. You, of course, dart into it. Now the huge, ferocious bird cannot reach you, for it cannot follow into the fissures: nor can it harm you in any way without first overthrowing the mountainous mass in which you are sheltered: and so it floats sullenly away, hoarsely screaming, disappointed of its prey; whilst you—still trembling it may be, but with a thankful joy in your heart past all expression—raise the cry, “There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.”



II.

ETERNITY IN THE HEART.

“He hath made everything beautiful in his time ; also he hath set the world in their heart.”—ECCLESIASTES iii. 11.

THE Revised Version proposes, in its rendering of this passage, two emendations, about which I venture to think that they are emendations indeed. It changes “his” into “its”; and in the margin it suggests that the word “eternity” should take the place of the word “world.” Were these two emendations adopted, the verse would run thus—“God hath made everything beautiful in *its* time ; also He hath set eternity in their heart”; *i.e.*, in the heart of the children of men. “But what does the writer mean,” you ask, “by so singular a statement?” Probably this—that, beautiful as the world is—with all its wealth of provision and arrangement for the happiness of God’s creatures—there is something in the human heart which forbids our being satisfied with it. That something the writer calls “eternity,” by which we are to understand the feeling of belonging to a higher and a nobler order of things, of having a destiny to which the present condition is merely the introduction—the school of preparation and discipline. Were we like the animals, we should be able simply to enjoy, and should ask for nothing more. There

the matter would begin and end. As it is, we can enjoy, and are intended to enjoy, but we cannot rest in the enjoyment. We look through the earthly things up to something beyond and above them. And this, the writer says, is a necessity of our nature, for the great Creator "hath set eternity in our heart." Assuming this, then, brethren, to be the correct interpretation of the passage—let us advance to consider some thoughts which are naturally suggested by it, and which may be found to be useful.

I.—In the first place, then, we may notice how true it is, as the writer tells us, that God has made everything "beautiful in its time." We are now in the early days of spring; and even in the midst of this wilderness of brick and mortar in which we live, we have evidence of the accuracy of the statement in the fresh, bright, virgin foliage—"the tender mist of green"—with which our trees have been clothed for some weeks past. I never remember a more lovely season. In the country it must be more lovely still. There is something especially attractive about spring. After the dulness and deadness of the winter, it comes in upon us like a sort of resurrection. It speaks of life and power and hope. It is the year girding itself up for the task that lies before it, in the consciousness of infinite yet hitherto unsuspected possibilities. But the glory of the spring—as we all of us know—will soon pass away, and give place to another. The tender green will change; in the country the broad sheets of blossom, the pure white flower of the pear or cherry-orchard, the delicate blush of the apple bloom will disappear; and in the town we shall see no longer the tasselled gold of the laburnum, or the purple clusters of the lilac-bush, or the ruddy glow of the coloured may, or the snow-

white spikes that gleam out from amongst the broad leaves of the chesnut. Another glory will have arrived—the glory of summer. Then there will be different winds, and different skies. Nature will have taken a step in advance, and be busy in preparing the bud for the arrival of the fruit, and will carry on her work until autumn comes. And when autumn comes, we shall behold another, and a riper and a richer loveliness. The boughs of the trees will bend with their load of fruit, and the cornfields will wave their honest brown ears in the breeze, and soon the song of the reaper and the cry of harvest-home will be heard, and men will rejoice together at the ingathering of the fruits of the earth, “ere the winter storms begin.”

Once more, brethren, the scene shifts, and now winter is upon us. “But has God,” you say, “made winter beautiful?” Surely He has. The trees are black and bare, for their summer-robe is gone ; but have you never noticed the delicate loveliness of their tracery against the sky, when the sun is sinking behind them in a deep orange glow? and have you never seen how the frost-king touches the very homeliest shrubs in your garden with his icy fingers, and turns them into silver? or how, when the air is keen, the stars hang out their brightest lamps, and shine with their most brilliant lustre in the dark canopy of the heaven? or how the white, smooth coverlet of the snow, drawn over the fields and the downs, suggests the thought of work successfully done, and of calm rest after finished toil? Ah! brethren, every season of the year has an excellency and a glory of its own ; for the Lord God has made everything “beautiful in its time.” Observe this—but observe this also, that the constant procession, the continual moving

forward, prevents you from dwelling too long upon any one of the passing scenes. One follows rapidly after the other, and you can only enjoy for a brief moment ; you cannot pause and stay.

II.—In the next place, I ask you to notice another feature of our human life—that every event seems to derive its chief importance from something else with which it is linked, and to which it ultimately leads. Take, for instance, the question of intellectual study. You study the alphabet by no means for its own sake, but because it enables you to understand words. You study words, because they enable you to understand sentences. You study sentences, because through them you get at the meaning of the author and master his teaching, and so become acquainted, it may be, with some important branch of human science. But is that science an end in itself? No! it is not ; or at least, it ought not to be. I know, well enough, that there are persons who are satisfied with the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. And I think I can understand their feelings. To a man, highly gifted, fashioned for profound intellectual research, and endowed with all the patience of the discoverer, there must be a peculiar attraction about the penetrating into the inner causes of things, and bringing out to light the secrets which nature seems disposed to hold so jealously back, except from a favoured few. And some of these philosophers, as you know, are tempted to rest in enquiry and discovery, just as if enquiry and discovery were all that they had to live and labour for. But such persons, brethren, are not the highest style of philosophers. For it is a grander thing to look through the investigation to the suffering race of men who

are to be benefited by it, to the Great God and Creator, whose glory is, by it, to be advanced on the earth. And the vastest acquisitions of learning, and the most magnificent triumphs of science, are touched with the glow of a new nobility when they are thus consecrated to a purpose altogether outside of and beyond themselves. It is well, then, to remember that there is a luxury of the intellect, as well as a luxury of the senses; and that we are no more justified in using our knowledge than we are in using our money, or any other talent that God may have bestowed upon us—for purposes of personal gratification. Every talent, however great, becomes a mean thing by being employed for self. And every talent, however insignificant, becomes a great thing when it is employed in the service of God and our fellow-men.

III.—Having said thus much on what may be called the general aspect of the subject, let me try, Christian brethren, to show how it bears, practically, upon our endeavours to lead a spiritual life—for that, I suppose, is the purpose which, in some shape or other, we all of us have in view. We come here in the hope of being helped to be made better than we are now; better than we feel ourselves to be. Well, what will the subject do for us in this direction? It will teach us one thing—that the wise and loving Being who created us intends us to enjoy the good things in the midst of which we are placed; but yet, to enjoy them with an amount of self-restraint, as not giving our hearts to them; as not allowing them, in the use, to exert too great, too fascinating an influence over us. “God intends us to enjoy”—I say. And I have the warrant of our text, for saying so. “God hath made all

things beautiful." But when God did this, and spread out the glorious scenery of air and sky; and made the world vocal with its many harmonies—from the thundering diapason of sound with which the Ocean flings his waves upon the shore, down to the song of the little lark, trilling out his glad notes from the mid-heaven over our heads; and when He contrived for us the sweetness of home and the delights of friendship—do you suppose that He cared nothing for our appreciation of these benefits? that He wished us to shut our ears, and close our eyes, and steel our hearts, and make ourselves as indifferent as possible to the rich abundance and profusion of the blessings with which He fills to the overflow our daily life? It were absurd to suppose such a thing—if, indeed, it were not something worse than absurd. And yet, although God has made everything beautiful, and everything to be a source of true and pure enjoyment—as it would be, were it not for sin—He has only made it beautiful "in its time." We must not linger upon it, lest the tendrils of our heart—that heart which is His—should twine themselves too closely and too fondly round the fascinations of the scene. We must just taste, and pass on; for there is, beyond the transient loveliness, the form of the coming "eternity," throwing its mysterious gleam over us, and warning us that, because the fashion of this world passeth away—attractive as it may be, and is meant to be—it is not the home of our spirits, not the place of our everlasting rest.

You remember, of course, the song of the Psalmist, that lovely pilgrim-song, in which he depicts the caravan of God's people making its way to the gates of the Heavenly

Jerusalem. Let me take a thought from it, with which to close this part of my subject. We are pilgrims, we Christian people, and the beauty of this world is like a well in the desert. Now, the well in the desert is only a halting-place. We plod along, then, over the hot sand, under the burning sun—not, indeed, altogether unsolaced by refreshment from above ; but still, sometimes weary and footsore, and sometimes stumbling, sometimes even inclined to despair—until at last we arrive, at the little oasis, with its cool green grass, and its tall feathery palms, and their welcome shadows, and the fresh, springing, sparkling waters of the road-side fountain. Here we may rest for awhile ; but we must not stay, for we are pilgrims. We must not allow ourselves to love our “well” so much that it shall hinder us from journeying. Presently we gird up our loins, and start again ; and then, looking forward, descry the lustre of the golden city—its towers, its palaces, its walls, its indescribable splendour shining up through the blue depths of the transparent air—and we are nerved by the sight to calm and patient endurance of the labour of the way. You catch the idea, of course ? God makes the world beautiful. He gives us the sweetness of the affections, and the love of friends, and the charm of mental occupation, and the joy of success in our enterprises, ay, and the pleasures of the senses, and many other blessings too numerous to mention—and they are wells by the way, waters in the desert. We are intended to use and enjoy them. But should we, unhappily, be found to cling to them with a too passionate devotion, and thus be diverted from the great work of our pilgrimage, it is only too likely that we shall wake up one day from our dream to discover

round us a scene of desolation—the fountain dry, the trees levelled to the ground, and all their verdure gone, the bright green sward strewn with bitter ashes, and nothing to be seen but the waste and hot and arid sand, with the pitiless sun blazing overhead. But, on the other hand, let us pass through the valley of this world as if it were only a well, only a temporary resting-place, and then we shall go on from strength to strength, and at last every one of us will appear in Zion, before the Lord our God.

But the text will teach us another, and, perhaps, a more important lesson still. It will show us that the true significance of human life is then only understood, when it is linked on to the Lord Jesus Christ, when He is the end and object set before us throughout. We have seen brethren, the divine method of succession, as it might be called—one thing leading on to another, and deriving its importance from the fact of its being a means of transition, and no step standing isolated and alone, as if it were complete in itself. It is the “eternity” kept in view which enables us to make a proper use of the opportunities of existence. Now, let us remember that, should the word “eternity” seem dim and indefinite (and it may do so to some), there is something perfectly intelligible, tangible, distinct, about the personal Jesus Christ, and about the idea of surrender to His will, and of consecration to His service. Just look round you. You have the devotion of the wife to her husband ; of the mother to her child ; of the patriot to his country ; of the soldier to the captain he follows to the field ; of the pupil to the master, whose genius he reveres, whose spirit he tries to catch, and whose works it is his highest ambition to imitate. Each of

these lives is ennobled by the relation in which it stands to something—or rather, to somebody—beyond itself. It is just so with us and the Lord Jesus Christ—only in the very highest conceivable degree. The possibilities that are in us are drawn out by a personal attachment to Him. For Jesus is one who commands, in equal measure, our reverence and our affection ; one whom we can love without being idolatrous, and worship without a slavish prostration of spirit, and follow without incurring any risk of being led astray. In Him is to be found, in absolute perfection, and in unbroken harmony, every feature of character which attracts the human heart—strength and delicacy, sympathy and determination, the spirit of self-sacrifice and the sternest sense of duty—combined with the most exquisite tenderness, the highest aspiration, and the most true and genuine humility ; profound devotion to the Father in Heaven, and the most touching love and compassion for the feeble and sinful brother on earth. Brethren, I know of nothing that is *not* in Him. Jesus is the complete and supreme moral beauty ; and, as the sun pours his beams on the bud in spring, and woos it to open its petals, and then tinges those petals with colouring, and perfumes them with fragrance, until the flower displays all the loveliness of which its nature is capable—so, when the Sun of Righteousness arises upon a human soul, that soul blossoms out, and clothes itself with a beauty which it never seemed capable of before—the beauty of conformity to the Saviour's image.

IV.—I ended my sermon last Sunday night by entreating my young hearers to entertain “ great thoughts ” about Jesus Christ. I will end in the same way now. These “ great

thoughts " are what—just what—you and I want. They are not, however, to be got without trouble. If you only glance now and then at Jesus Christ, you will really see nothing : you will say, "surely, there is neither form nor comeliness in Him." If you allow yourselves in the indulgence of any sin, you will simply dislike Him, and the dislike will grow upon you. Or, if you are careless and indifferent, and take no pains to contemplate His character, you cannot expect to be able to comprehend Him. But plant yourselves down before Him, and study Him as an enthusiastic and devoted artist studies the masterpiece of some great painter ; be anxious to understand Him, to receive inspiration from Him : gaze at Him in the written word ; dwell upon every feature of that magnificent face and figure—and the Holy Spirit will take of the things of Christ and show them unto you, and the vision of the incarnate and glorified Son of God will rise upon you more and more, and draw you up above the meannesses and pettinesses and temptations of earth, and will ennoble you with the citizenship of that city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. "We all, with open face, beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."



III.

THE POWER OF MEMORY.

“But Abraham said, Son, remember.”—LUKE xvi. 25.

SOME years ago, when I was in Scotland for my summer holiday, I made the acquaintance of a shrewd, intelligent, educated man of business, who was a worshipper in the church to which, at the time, I happened to be ministering. In the course of one of the many conversations he and I had together, he told me that, on a certain occasion, he had escaped—almost by a miracle—from death by drowning. With the details of the incident I need not trouble you; the important point is this—that, before he had become unconscious, but just when he had given up all hope of being saved, his memory seemed to be preternaturally quickened. You have seen a flash of lightning, on a densely dark night, dart suddenly across the landscape, and reveal everything that has been previously concealed, and reveal it with an almost appalling distinctness. Something like that occurred to my friend. Instantly, the whole of his past life—his boyhood, his youth, his manhood—stood out vividly before him; circumstances came into the picture which, a moment before he would have said that he had absolutely and entirely forgotten; and he was brought face to face—he could not tell how—with all that

at any time he had thought, or spoken, or done. I had heard of such things before—and I suppose that we all of us have—but never, till that day, had I been brought into contact with one who had passed through this particular and mysterious experience. And I was set a-thinking. And the thought that then occurred to me came back again to me when I was examining the Gospel for the day, with the idea of preaching about it.

There are certain invisible inks—they call them “sympathetic” inks—with which you can write a sentence, many sentences, as many sentences as there is room for—on a white linen cloth, and yet nothing whatever shall appear to the eye of the observer. The surface is a perfect blank. But hold the cloth or the paper to the warmth of a fire, and every mark that has been made on it—down to the dotting of an “i,” and the crossing of a “t”—stands forth to the view. It was there before, of course, but it required certain conditions to reveal it. And, perhaps, brethren, that human faculty which we call “memory” is of the same retentive kind. Perhaps you and I never really forget anything we do. We seem to forget; but we do not. Every impression, in which our moral nature has been concerned, remains stamped upon us. And it needs only a change of circumstances—such as might conceivably occur on our entrance into a future state—to revivify, and make real the various scenes which have taken place in the course of the very longest human life.

I think you will gather from this introduction what subject I propose to discuss to you this morning. It is “Memory.” And I will take two points of view. First, I will speak about memory as a salutary instrument of moral

and spiritual discipline in this world. And then, as a terrible instrument of retribution—of deserved penalty—in the world to come. And the exceptional solemnity of the Gospel for the day must be my excuse for the unavoidable gloominess which will characterise the latter part of my discourse.

I.—Now, with regard to the first division of our subject we have an obvious illustration of it in the fact of our gathering together here to-day for the purpose of worshipping God, and of listening to the preaching of the Word. There may be many reasons—no doubt there are many—for the institution of the Sunday, but certainly among them is this—that we may be continually reminded of the pre-eminent importance of our being prepared for the closer contact with the divine holiness into which we expect to be ushered when the veil is dropped, and we enter into the mysterious kingdom that lies behind it. The pressure exerted upon us by the things of time and sense is a tremendous one; and were it not that we are brought to a stand, and made to pause, periodically, by an ordinance of God's own appointment—by a day devoted to rest and worship—we should, all of us, I fear, be swept before the current, and plunged into a condition of insensate and incurable worldliness. Ill, then, is it with those to whom the Lord's Day is like any other day, or who spend in it careless self-indulgence—for they miss the reminder of eternity, which is inseparably connected with it. Well is it with those who use it as God intended it should be used—in such a way, that is, as to keep before them the recollection of being pilgrims here, passing through the wilderness of this world to the land of an everlasting rest.

But there is more than this to be said on the subject of perpetual reminder. The Lord, who knew what was in man, and who knew, therefore, how easily and how rapidly religious impressions are effaced from the human breast—took care that the people whom He brought up out of Egypt should have continuous instruction in the great facts of their history, and in the great doctrines of their holy faith. Independently of the daily morning and evening sacrifice—independently of many occasional rites and ceremonies—He appointed the three great festivals, at which every Jew was to be present—Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles—so that no member of the house of Israel, who obeyed the divine directions, could fail to have his memory, at least, exercised about the things which concerned salvation.

And we, brethren, of the Church of England, enjoy something of the same advantage, if we care to avail ourselves of it. In the course of the ecclesiastical year, we are led through the whole cycle of Christian doctrine. The great events of our Lord's life—from His birth in the manger to His ascent from the Mount of Olives—are brought in succession before us. Four Sundays are devoted to the momentous topic of His second advent; and the greater part of the Bible, with all its multifarious teachings, is brought before us in the appointed lessons. Nothing I venture to say, is omitted. And if continued reiteration is worth anything—produces any effect—there is not one of us who has not the opportunity afforded him of having his memory in religious matters kept alive and awake.

But let us turn to another thought, suggested, as the former one was, by the history of the chosen people. When

Israel stood on the borders of the promised land, girding themselves up for that career of struggle and conquest which was to put them in possession of it, the great Lawgiver considered it the best preparation for the impending task, that they should exercise their memories in recalling the circumstances of their just-finished sojourn in the wilderness. A thoughtful retrospect of the events which had befallen them, or rather, as I should say, of the divine dealings with their nation, would, he believed, do more than anything else to provide them with the necessary qualifications, with the wisdom and courage and strength and calmness and patience and foresight which the situation demanded. By carefully considering the past, they would be more fitted to encounter the future. They would understand themselves better, and they would understand God better. The meaning of the long and varied discipline through which they had passed, the significance of the divine judgments and of the divine mercies would open up to them as they pondered over the subject ; and they would go forth with a steadiness and a confidence, which they could not otherwise hope to acquire, free from haste and rashness, but equally free from any doubt or misgiving about the ultimate success of their enterprise. This is what he said : "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness."

And, I doubt not, Christian brethren, that you and I may find here, if we choose to do so, a valuable hint for ourselves. If we would be strong for our work ; capable of making progress in divine things ; if we would really grasp eternity with a firm hand, and put under our feet the seductions and allurements of the present passing scene, we

shall be greatly helped towards so desirable a consummation by keeping our spiritual memories fresh and green—by which I mean frequently recalling to mind both the severity and the goodness of the Lord towards us in the past—His severity in the chastisements which we have incurred by shortcoming and sin, by our folly and perverseness; the goodness, which has pardoned and restored us, and held us up, and brought us thus far in peace and safety on our earthly pilgrimage. It is no favourable sign in a man of business to be slovenly and slipshod in the management of his affairs. I suppose that every one of you makes up his accounts, as far as is possible, at the close of every day, besides having certain great occasions on which he “takes stock,” and ascertains with precision the exact position in which he is placed. I do not see why we should be less careful in spiritual things. Rather do I see good reason why we should exercise even greater carefulness. And surely, when the day closes in, and all its opportunities have passed away, it will be well for us if we devote a few minutes to a survey, as in the presence of God, of the way by which He has led us; of the faithfulness, or unfaithfulness, with which we have discharged our respective duties; of the spiritual gains we have made, and of the spiritual losses we have incurred, during the twenty-four hours, and thus gather wisdom and strength and experience for the morrow. And surely it will be equally advantageous to utilize some marked event in our lives—say, our birthday; say, the beginning of a new year; say the date of our Confirmation; or say, for a clergyman, the day of his Ordination—by an unusually careful and deliberate scrutiny.

of our spiritual position. Many souls, I fear, are lost not so much by wilful sin as by simple want of thought and consideration. Men go on, day after day, day after day, without stopping to think, until the habit of indifference becomes settled and inveterate, and they *cannot* really care. Let us then, brethren, have the wisdom to make of our memory—what it is intended to be—an important auxiliary in the matter of our spiritual progress in this world, lest, peradventure, by our neglect, it prove to be a tormentor to us in the world to come.

II.—And this thought brings me to the second division of our subject. The words of our text—"Son, remember"—were addressed by Abraham to the rich man in Hades, when he complained of the agony he was suffering. There is not much consolation—nor is there meant to be much consolation—in them. They mean—"This is what you might have expected. This is what you have procured for yourself. The blame lies at your own door, and nowhere else." Now, as I have often taken occasion to point out to you, the awfulness of this parable lies very much in the fact that the principal personage in it is by no means what we should be inclined to call a wicked man. No vice, no immorality, no fraudulence, no avowed hostility to religion—nothing of the kind—is laid to his charge. He is simply a man of the world—such an one as you have not, I suspect, to go far to look for amongst your friends and acquaintances. He had lived for this life, and this life alone. The future had never really entered into his calculations. And when he passed, at death, into the mysterious, spiritual, unseen kingdom—he was so totally unprepared for it, so completely out of harmony with it; everything, he found, was so

strange, so uncongenial, so repulsive, so revolting to him that he was plunged into a condition of absolute and unutterable misery. This state of things might, of course, have been anticipated (as Abraham tells him), but it was not the less distressing when it came.

Now, it is clear, brethren, that one element—one chief element—in this man's suffering, *was the awakening of his memory*. You know the strange power which we have of recalling an event—especially a sin—from however great a distance of time, and enacting it over again, fixing it, as it were, before us. Suppose—permit the supposition—that, in our younger days, we did a thing which was terribly wrong, and which involved consequences, not only to ourselves, but also to others. Well, the circumstance is in the far past. It cannot be altered now. The mischief done cannot be repaired; and perhaps those who suffered by us are, by this time, out of the reach of any reparation we might wish to make. But have we got rid of the thing? We know that we have not. There are occasions when it rises up like a spectre and haunts us with bitter feelings of shame and regret and self-reproach and remorse, and we would give worlds—if we had them—to undo the thing that we have done. Here, we have the formidable power of memory. And, as I understand it, in the case of the rich man in the parable, the vision of the irreparable past (for he was one whose whole life had been one act of indifference to God) rose up before his mind, and stood face to face with him, and refused to depart. He was compelled to dwell upon it perpetually. He might have obtained forgiveness, and he had not. He might have gained fitness for the eternal world, and he had not. He

might have loved God, and he finds now that he recoils from Him. He had had opportunities, and they were allowed to pass by ; talents, and they were unimproved. He had been pleaded with by the Spirit of God, and had invariably turned a deaf ear. His soul beats through the weary round—thinking, thinking, thinking of these things, now that it is too late ; and, as he is unable to tear himself from the contemplation of them, his memory becomes—who can wonder at it ?—a curse to him.

The old Romans had a terrible punishment for a certain kind of murderer. The criminal, when condemned, was fastened face to face, hand to hand, foot to foot, to the corpse of his victim. Can you imagine anything more hideous ? The criminal compelled to contemplate his own handiwork continually, unable to escape from it, perishing slowly in the grip and embrace of the very crime which he has himself committed ! It is simply horrible. But just such a punishment had the careless and self-indulgent worldling of the parable prepared for himself. “Prepared for himself,”—I say, for it was his own doing—not God’s. It was the result of the operation of spiritual laws. Memory, awakened too late, bound him in inextricable bonds—face to face—with an eternal contemplation of the sinful past. “Son,”—thou who wast a son in position and privilege, and who mightest have been a son in reality—“remember ;” *and he was obliged to remember.*

I said that my subject would be a sombre one. And so it has proved to be. For, if I interpret the parable rightly, it teaches us this—that it is not necessary to be vicious, or dishonest ; not necessary to be a profligate or an infidel, in order to secure for ourselves a future of misery ?

we have only to turn a deaf ear to the pleading of the Spirit, and the monitions of conscience ; we have only to be practical rejectors of the Lord Jesus Christ—giving Him no real place in our hearts and life, but keeping Him all along outside ; we have only to do this—and then, in the enforced recollection of what might have been and was not—in the recollection of blessedness offered and thrown away, of loss unspeakable deliberately chosen—we shall have the elements of a wretchedness that words cannot express, and which our minds refuse to dwell upon for more than a passing moment.



IV.

THE FATHER'S HEART.

“But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.”—

LUKE xv. 20.

THE chapter, to which my text belongs, contains, as you know, three parables. Two of them—the parable of the lost sheep, and that of the lost piece of money—were read in the Gospel for the day. The third, which is the longest and most important—for its two predecessors obviously lead up to it—is generally called the “Parable of the Prodigal Son,” and it is to it that I am anxious to direct your attention in the present discourse. Before, however, we enter upon the discussion of the subject, bear with me whilst I offer, as briefly as possible, a couple of introductory remarks on points that it is well for us to understand, and to keep in mind.

I.—The first of them is this—it has been hinted at already—that the first two parables are really introductory to the third; and that, therefore, it is of some importance to read the chapter which contains them as a whole. If you take the last parable by itself, it may surprise you, perhaps, to find that what we may call the movement of return in the prodigal, is represented as originating entirely in the man’s own breast; that there is no endeavour

made to secure us against supposing that the reviving love and tenderness of the father are caused by the man's repentance; that all allusions, direct or indirect, to the atoning blood of the Cross—through which alone a sinner can approach God—are omitted from the narrative. But these essential thoughts have been already supplied—or at all events, suggested—in the preceding portions of the Saviour's discourse: for the first narrative implies, by the figure of the shepherd introduced into it, the fact that the Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep; and the second, which depicts the Holy Spirit working in the Church, reminds us of the supernatural influence which must be brought to bear upon a sinner before he will have even the inclination to forsake his evil ways, and to turn to the Lord his God with purpose of heart.

My second introductory remark refers to the two persons in the third parable—the elder and the younger brother—for about the father, of course, there can be no manner of doubt. Who, then, are they? To this question three answers may be given, and all of them sufficiently correct. In the primary application they are, obviously, the self-righteous Pharisees on the one side, and the publicans and sinners of the day on the other: those who said, when ordered into the vineyard, "I go, sir," but went not; and those who, under the same circumstances, sturdily refused obedience at first, but afterwards repented and went; or, we may widen the application a little, and take in the Jew and the Gentile—the elder brother being the Jew, the younger being the Gentile; or, again, we may regard them as two classes of men of any age, of any race;

or, as I should prefer expressing it, a representation of two different tendencies of the human soul—tendencies, which lead, when indulged in, to the formation of two such diverse characters as those which the Lord brings before us, in His own graphic way, in the parable.

I will carry with me this last idea to my discussion of this evening. The younger and the elder brothers, then, may be found almost everywhere...in every community, in every church, perhaps, I might say, in every congregation ; and if so, may possibly be found amongst ourselves. No one can tell. But now, without further preface, let us turn to the parable.

II.—Its method is simple. Possibly, it is not a mere religious story—a fiction—but rather, gives an account of events that had actually occurred within the memory of those to whom the Saviour addresses Himself. At any rate, it describes what might be likely enough to have occurred under existing circumstances, when Jewish precision was brought into such close contact with Gentile laxity, as was the case in Palestine, in the time of our Lord ; and the mere probability would have added interest to the narrative, and given it something of the effectiveness and power of actual fact. We have placed before us a well-ordered country home, with all its usual surroundings and appliances, with tokens of comfort and competence on every side. The father—a man advancing in years—is godly and devout, very loving to his children and yet exacting, with some strictness, obedience to the laws of the household, because he feels himself answerable to God for the conduct of his family. He has two sons—grown men—of different temper. One is inclined to

self-will and impatience, to passionate self-indulgence ; the other, the elder, is of a colder and more self-contained nature, and is not so likely to commit any open breach of discipline, as to be wanting in true respect and affection for his father. He is one of those people who believe themselves to be always in the right, and who are very prompt to demand that you should recognise their rectitude, and reward them for it. He has in him, in fact, the material out of which the self-righteous character is formed. Such, brethren, is the state of things in this well-ordered, well-to-do, decorous, and apparently happy household when the curtain rises (if I may say so), and a succession of scenes begins to appear and pass before our view.

In the first of them, the younger son comes hastily into his father's presence to make a request of him. What is it? That his father will give him his liberty ; will let him leave the house and go out into the world ; and furnish him with a supply of money to enable him to carry out the plans upon which his heart is set. And what does the request mean? Just this. That the quiet decorum and regularity of the old-fashioned household have become intolerable to the young man ; that the atmosphere of the place, and even of his father's presence, is oppressive to him ; that he is wild to get amongst the gay visions, the fascinations and allurements of the outer world, and will not rest till he finds himself there ; that, at any cost, he is determined to be gone—if only to escape from the dulness and monotony, and the everlasting routine in which his early days have been spent. Did you ever meet with this younger son, brethren? I do not know. But if you should at any time

happen to see a young fellow, or an older fellow, who wearies of religion, wearies of what he calls the "dulness" of the Father's spiritual house, puts his Bible aside, lays it on a shelf, as if it were an old fossil, and not a living thing ; detaches himself by degrees from the company and occupations of the people of Christ ; and, following the beckoning of a hand which lures him on to pleasure, or summons him to the pursuits of ambition, goes forth with the avowed purpose of "seeing life"—you may depend upon it that *that* is the man whom our Lord means by the younger son in the parable. Well, the father receives the application, and sorrowfully consents to it. He has been expecting this for some time past. Has he not noticed the change for the worse that has been going on in the lad ? the coldness, the indifference that has been creeping over him ? the gradual alienation of heart from his parents and his home ? Of course, he has. And now, knowing that it is useless to expostulate or to resist, he lets him go. Just as God lets us go our own way, if we are determined to take it. God will not compel us to remain in His service. In fact, I suppose that even He cannot compel a human heart. But He leaves us to be filled with the fruit of our own devices—in the expectation and the hope that the misery, which our self-will will invariably bring upon us, may be found to drive us back to the arms of His fatherly love.

And here the curtain falls. When it rises again, the young man has gone. He did hesitate a little, it is true, at first. For he was more than half-ashamed of himself, and he was a little afraid, too, of the consequences of the step which he was proposing to take ; and he could not quite forget the instructions of his father ; the prayers he had

offered when a child at his mother's knee. But, presently he mustered up courage, and took the plunge, and now—he is gone. Gone *where*? Into “the far country,” the region where God is not known; or, if known, is forgotten, or ignored; where business is conducted without God; where human life goes on without God; where serious thoughts are kept at arm's length, and not allowed to intrude and disturb the mind; where the Scriptures are banished, and prayer is abandoned, and men shut their ears against all voices that tell of judgment to come. Such is “the far country.” And this young man—brought up in a godly home, and surrounded from his cradle by all good influences—the subject of unnumbered father's and mother's prayers—has now become a settled inhabitant of it. He has cast in his lot with those who despise and hate the God of his father.

And yet, brethren, there is a sort of factitious brightness about the scene. The actors in it seem to be enjoying themselves. Although they regard not the works of the Lord, neither consider the operation of His hands, yet the harp, the viol, the tabret, the pipe, and wine, are in their feast. And some of us may ask, “Is not this joyousness better, after all, ay, and more pleasing to God, and more in accordance with His purposes and intentions about men, than the dull, puritanical routine of the old father's household, with its morning and evening prayers, and Sunday services, and long sermons, and Bible-reading, and Psalm-singing, and early hours, and general tone of sombreness thrown over the genial human life?” Well, we shall see presently. Meantime, the curtain is beginning to drop; and, as it descends, we catch a glimpse of

a group of flushed revellers—men and women—gathered in a sumptuous apartment, round a well-lighted and well-furnished board. Beautiful pictures hang on the walls, white statues gleam in the recesses, servants bustle to and fro in every direction, music sounds through the hall—but, for the moment, the gay song is hushed, whilst the guests, each of them cup in hand (but some with an ill-concealed sneer on their lips), rise, and drink to the health of the munificent founder of the feast—the cynosure of all eyes—the leader of the fashion—the young man who sits at the head of the table, magnificently apparelled, and in whom we can just manage to detect the youngster who came—not so many months ago—from that dull old house in the country.

Once more the the scene shifts: All is changed. The illusions have passed away, and disenchantment has come. And the young man—his substance wasted—abandoned by his friends, beggared, miserable, degraded in his own eyes, and in the eyes of the world—scarcely knows where to turn for a crust to stay the cravings of his appetite, when a mighty famine comes into the land, and completes his ruin. He has now but one resource left: and to avail himself of it is to sink himself to the very lowest depth. But hunger drives. And he enters the service of a native of the country, who sends him into his field to feed swine. Imagine that, brethren! Imagine a gentleman, a man of education and refinement, a man descended from a long line of honourable ancestors, himself well-nurtured and brought up—above all, a Jew—set to such filthy work (as he would count it), and not able even to keep body and soul together by the wages that he receives for doing it.

What a thrill of horror—of repulsion—must have passed through the crowd of Jewish listeners, as the words dropped from the Saviour's lips! And must not our Lord have been speaking of what had actually happened—within His own knowledge? But, however this may be, the underlying meaning is obvious enough. There comes a time in the life of self-will and self-seeking—which is only another name for the life of sin—when the soul discovers that it has been spending money for that which is not bread, and its labour for that which satisfieth not. It can find no rest in the line which it has chosen. The thing to which it has devoted itself—fame (it may be), or ambition, or pleasure, or gold—does not fill the aching void of the heart—that heart which was made for the enjoyment of God—and the man begins to suffer the torment of unsatisfied desire. Then supervenes some great trouble—a bereavement, or a loss, or a dangerous sickness,—and matters are brought to a climax. Under such circumstances, what does a man do? “Turn to God,” you say. Not always. Not, perhaps, often. He will try something first. He joins himself to a citizen of that “far country”—where God is not known—*i.e.*, he gives himself more desperately than ever to the pursuit of the world—as thinking that if he only had more of what his soul craves for—more fame, more money, more sensual pleasure—all would be well. So he tries the experiment, and it fails. The last plank breaks under him, and he is plunged into the dark waters of despair—and now, deserted by both God and man—unworthy of the favour of either—helpless, hopeless, lost—what else can he do than yield to his fate, and abandon himself to the irremediable ruin which he has prepared for himself?

And on this sad picture again the curtain descends. But is there no further scene? Have we come to the last word of God's dealing with sinful man? Thank God, we have not. We look up—and now there is a wretched figure—emaciated, worn, clad in rags, downcast, miserable—scoffed at as he passes along the road—there he is, shuffling along feebly, as well as he can, in the direction of the old country homestead. We see who it is. Ah! he is rather changed for the worse since that time when he sate in the brilliant banqueting-room, receiving the compliments of his friends—praised and flattered by all—the idol of the hour. We know his history. “And so he thinks”—we say—“that young fool, that, after all that has happened—after all the waste and the riot and the impurity; after all the disgrace brought on the family name—his father will receive him again. *Will* he?” “Yes;” cries the poor fellow, “he will—he will. I know my father's heart. He has still some love for me—unworthy, deeply unworthy, as I am of it. Of course, I cannot expect him to put me back into the place I once occupied. I have fallen too low for that. It will not be right for him to recognise me as a son. But he will not, I am sure, leave me to starve and perish. He will find some corner for me in his household, in which I may draw the breath of life in rather less misery than I am suffering now, and find rest and quiet. Say what you like, I believe it. At all events, I will try. I will arise, and go to my father, and tell him how I have sinned, and ask him to have pity upon me.” And on he goes—lamely, but resolutely—his face set in one direction—heedless of the jeers of the crowd—pressing on, until the noise and the babble and the laughter die away in the distance behind

him. You know what follows. The poor prodigal was not mistaken about his father's love. Considering how badly that father had been treated, he might very well have been expected to order the young man off the grounds ; or, at least, to stand coldly and sternly in the doorway, rebuking him for his sins ; and then, if he received him at all, to assign him some menial position in the household. But he does nothing of the kind. I daresay he was in the habit of going up to the housetop, day after day, and looking along the road, to see if there were any signs of his poor prodigal's return. But whether this were so or not—as soon as he catches sight of the lad, he runs to meet him. Dignity is laid aside. Love triumphs over decorum. It is enough that his boy is miserable and repentant, his heart turning at last towards his father—and the father falls on his neck and kisses him—stops his confession half-way—will hear no more of it—will not listen to his proposal to be a servant in the house—but brings him in, and reinstates him in his sonship, in the calm and peace and blessedness, to which he has been so long a stranger. *And this father, brethren—is God !*

One of the bishops of our Church told me, not long ago, that, having to preach a sermon in the East-end, he was led to speak very simply about the love of God. Now, it happened that an infidel—an educated and intelligent man—was present on the occasion, and he was greatly touched, by hearing what was, to him, a new revelation of the divine character. He had formed a totally different conception of God ; and, as he passed out of the building, he said to some one whom he knew, and who was connected with the church—"Is God like that ? Is God really like that ?"

It was a new revelation to him, and—if I remember rightly—it produced the happiest effects upon his future character and life. Argument, he could have repelled. The love of God broke him down. It is just possible—not that there should be an infidel present amongst us to-night—though that may be the case—but that there should be some one who has burst away into the “far country”—the land without God; who is wretched at being there, and does not know how to find his way back to the Father’s home. He depicts God to himself as angry, inexorable, hard, unwilling to receive him back again, after all that has occurred, after all the self-will and defiance and wrong-doing, and, perhaps, vice and riotous living—of which his conscience accuses him. It is natural, I know, to do so. Conscience says: “No hope!” Satan says: “No hope!” Perhaps society echoes—“No hope!” But, oh! let such an one believe (if such an one be here) that to him is the message of this parable, and of this salvation sent. God is no stern judge—at least, not until He is absolutely compelled to be such—but a loving Father—who watches for, and longs for, the return of His prodigal son. Christ must know; and Christ tells us so. “God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”



V.

THE TENDERNESS OF KING MESSIAH.

“He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass ; as showers that water the earth.” (Bible version.)—PSALM lxxii. 6.

THIS Psalm is supposed to have been circulated amongst the people of Israel at the beginning of the reign of Solomon. Whether written by Solomon himself—as some say—or by his royal father—as others believe—it is obviously a prayer for the young sovereign ; and the drift of the prayer is, that he may be the ideal king : in other words, everything that a king ought to be. Such a king, the people had been expecting for long ; but he had not as yet appeared. The first monarch proved to be a failure. He was not without good qualities—but he was perverse and self-willed, and died by his own hand in a battle which he lost ; and no one would dream of pointing to the reign of Saul, the son of Kish, as a bright spot in the Jewish annals. His successor, as we know, was a man of a different stamp. The darling of the people, a true Israelite, and honoured of God, he was successful in his enterprises, and made Israel respected and feared amongst the nations of the earth. Still, there were clouds to darken even this fair prospect. The character of David—although noble, and in the main, profoundly re-

ligious—was yet not free from grave blemishes. His reign, too, was a period of trouble and strife, of warfare and bloodshed. When it was ended, it was clear to the conscience of the Jewish nation that the ideal king, and the ideal kingdom, had not yet come amongst them.

Now, however, a new state of things was on the point of being ushered in, and unusual expectations, in which David himself seems to have very largely shared, were raised about it. The coming reign, it was thought, would be a period of unexampled prosperity—both at home and abroad. At home, the Temple, the house of Jehovah—for which such elaborate preparations had been made—for which silver and gold and precious stones, and costly wood, in lavish profusion, had been heaped together for a long term of years—would rear its stately front in Jerusalem, would be “exceeding magnificent,” the pride of the people of God, and the envy of the surrounding nations; and a worship, corresponding in gorgeousness of ceremonial and in heartiness of devotion to the magnificent fane itself, would be conducted within its walls. Abroad, the sceptre of Solomon would extend over a large portion of the habitable earth; and it was hardly too much to expect that all kings should ultimately fall down before him, and all nations do him service. The monarch himself—in his person, in his character, in his mental power, in his devotion to the best interests of his subjects—seemed likely to be worthy of the vast and peaceful empire with which God had entrusted him. And was it not, then, conceivable, that, under such circumstances as these, the long-cherished day-dream of Israel should at last be fulfilled? At all events, it was clearly right that the prayer of the people

should go up for their youthful ruler, and that this should be the direction which the petition should take. And, accordingly, the Psalm with which we are concerned this evening was composed and circulated and used in public, and, no doubt, in private worship, by the whole of Israel.

Now, whether Solomon did, or did not, regard himself as likely to be the ideal monarch, it may be difficult to say. That the people did, I doubt not. At that time, the idea of King Messiah as a divine-human personage was only imperfectly developed; and it was not until after a succession of hopes had been raised and disappointed, that even the spiritual part of the nation were taught to lift up their eyes, and to look beyond the horizon of earthly things, for the glory that should be revealed. But Solomon was the subject of a special inspiration; and, in all probability, he considered himself to be the mere representative and forerunner of Him who was to come. It was his business, he thought, not to pose as the ultimate fulfilment of Israel's hope, but to approximate as nearly as he could, God helping him, to the mighty standard, and, by so doing, to raise up his people after him. If this were so, we see clearly, and may express in few words, the purpose of the Psalm. It indicates what a perfect king ought to be, but what no merely human king ever has been or ever will be. It points, therefore, with no dubious distinctness, to Messiah; and we Christians naturally regard it as unfolding the chief characteristics of the reign and rule of the Lord Jesus Christ—that mediatorial reign and rule which are even now going on, and, by means of which, things are gradually advancing to the perfect establishment of God's kingdom upon earth.

Taking, then, this view of the Psalm as a whole, let us consider three characteristics of Christ's present kingdom suggested by it—dealing with two of them briefly ; with the third (that implied in the language of our text) rather more at length.

I.—We remark, then, in the first place, the universal extension of this kingdom. It is supposed, I believe, by some—who fix their attention strongly upon the great diversity of character and circumstance, of mental and moral proclivities, that exist amongst human beings—that Christianity is only one, though it may be the best, amongst the religions of the world. It is supposed by others that Jesus Christ is by no means the last teacher of the human race ; they tell us that He has gone further than any of His predecessors in the right direction, and taught men better ; but that there are other prophets beyond Him, and that we may, perhaps, expect one of these to appear before very long upon the stage of human affairs. And yet again, to turn to the servants of Christ, it seems, to some of them, a somewhat perplexing and painful circumstance—that, after so many centuries have passed since the great sacrifice was offered upon Mount Calvary, it is only a comparatively small portion of the vast human family that is irradiated with the light of Christian truth. Now, to all these questions, our Psalm supplies an adequate reply. The writer knows of no one who is to come after Christ. Christ is the last word spoken by God to the children of men. “His name shall endure for ever ; His name shall be continued as long as the sun.” And again, the writer implies that the religion of Jesus Christ is equally well-suited for all orders and degrees of men—for the rich and the poor,

for the cultivated and the ignorant—for men of every nation and of every age—inasmuch as it makes its appeal to the fundamental principles, and meets every need of the humanity that is common to us all. And more than this, the writer leads us to anticipate the time when all opposition to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ shall have come to an end. At present, it is true, this happy consummation has not been realised. There are broad tracts of this world of ours where the Saviour's rule is not acknowledged, and where, indeed, even His name has not yet been heard. And we—in our impatience and unbelief—are inclined to murmur at the slowness with which the divine purposes are being evolved. But slow though the progress may be, the event will come at last, and nothing shall be able to thwart or hinder its advance ; for “Jesus”—as the Psalmist expresses it—“shall have dominion from the river unto the ends of the earth :” and the day *must* dawn when all shall know Him as the Lord, from the least unto the greatest, and when the tide of divine knowledge shall roll over the earth and its multitudinous peoples—leaving no nook, however remote, unpenetrated, and no peak, however lofty and inaccessible, untouched and unglorified by its gracious and healing influence.

II.—In the next place, I ask you to consider the indications given in the Psalm, that the rule of the Lord Jesus Christ is a firm and strong rule, because it is a righteous one. According to the Psalmist, the ideal king will not tolerate any disorder in his dominions ; indeed, if he did, he would not be fit to reign. You will remember the words : “He will break in pieces the oppressor : His enemies shall lick the dust.” Let us not, then, suppose that

the mediatorial rule of the Lord Jesus Christ has nothing to show for itself but gentleness and tenderness, and what we are accustomed to call "love." Love, undoubtedly, is the great characteristic of Christ, but it is love which does not shrink from severity—not even from extreme severity—when such measures are needed. You have only to call to mind the Epistles to the Seven Churches, to see that it is so. There you have Jesus Christ the High Priest upon His throne—the crowned and glorified Sovereign walking in the midst of His people, knowing their works, watching their ways, taking account of every minute particular and detail of their conduct, whether it be an act of steadfast adhesion to His cause, or the first secret beginnings of a deteriorating and decaying love. *Is He all gentleness?* You know that He is not. And so, brethren, we must not expect Him to be tolerant to our sins. Depend upon it, the true servants of Christ never transgress without being made, in some way or other, to smart for their transgression. Christ loves us too well to injure us—may I not say?—to curse us with impunity. "As many as I love" (He says) "I rebuke and chasten." And so as to the outer world, that ranges itself against Him under the leadership of "the god of this world"—His dealings with them, His movements, are leisurely, because He is unwilling to smite; because He wishes to give time and space for repentance; because judgment is His strange work. But, we may be sure of this, that, when the antagonism is found to be settled and incurable, sooner or later, the heavy chariot-wheels of His wrath roll over His opponents, and grind them to powder.

III.—We come now to our third and last point. Here we have another, and a different side of the character of the ideal King—His tender gentleness. Jesus Christ is all that the Psalmist depicts in the way of greatness and power; and He is more than all that. But it remains to be said of Him that “He shall come down as rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth.” Let us consider the former of these two beautiful statements. It will be as much as we can manage to do in the time that remains.

The imagery is as simple as it is touching. When the mower’s scythe has passed over the meadow, the stalks of the grass are left in the earth, maimed and, as it were, bleeding; the shelter which once protected the roots is withdrawn, and the plant is exposed, more especially in hot Oriental climates, to the scorching rays of the sun. At such a time the descent of a gentle shower from the sky is just the blessing that is needed. By its tender and healing help the danger is averted, and the drooping plant made vigorous again. Such is the image of the Psalmist, and the application of it to the Lord Jesus Christ is obvious enough. Welcome to us as the Saviour is at all times, there is an especial sweetness in His visitations when we are cut down and laid bare by trouble; and it is the time of trouble that the Saviour chiefly selects for self-manifestation to His believing people.

But why is it that the sympathy of the Lord Jesus Christ with us is so precious and so powerful, as we know it to be?

When we are in sorrow, brethren, what our soul really craves for, is *the contact of a personal tenderness*. At such a time a man may come and discourse to us about the inevitableness of death; or about the value of affliction as

a discipline ; or about the manliness of a resolute and uncomplaining endurance of pain and loss ; or about the comforts that are still left to us, even though we have been bereaved of much that we held dear ; or about the wisdom of accepting the inevitable ; or about the duty of submission to the will of God ; and he may speak eloquently and well, and everything he says may be perfectly true ; but all his wise words will count as nothing in comparison with the clasp of the hand, and the tone of the voice, which tells that our grief has found an echo in the speaker's breast, and that he is feeling for us and with us. It is when heart touches heart that we are comforted ; and then it is that the soft and gentle rain has come down upon the newly-mown grass. But, precious as human sympathy is —most precious, as we know—it has in it an element of imperfection, from the very constitution of our human nature. Who is there that thoroughly understands us ? No earthly friend, brethren ; not even our nearest and dearest. To a very great extent, we are mysteries, riddles, enigmas to one another. There are recesses in our souls, into which no one has ever penetrated ; conflicts going on, which no one even suspects ; personal problems we have to solve, and are trying to solve, which no one can solve for us. And it must be so. It is a necessity of our independent existence ; and, however closely we may approach a friend, we must still stand outside of his inner being, as circles do that touch, but do not actually overlap each other's circumferences.

But when it is Jesus Christ that approaches us, the case is altered. His perfect acquaintance with us, His cognisance of those "antecedents," as we call them, which cause us to

be what we are—enables Him to deal with our souls with the most unerring exactitude. Christ knows how to make allowance. He knows how much, and how little we can bear. He can discriminate between fault and misfortune. All the disadvantages of our early education and our present surroundings; all our honest struggles, our difficulties, our failures—everything lies bare and open to Him as it does to no one else; and He is prepared with the gentle touch, and the soothing word, as they may be required—being careful to be neither too severe, nor yet too lenient, and never making a single false step or mistake concerning us. And then there is His love for us. It is a great thing to be assured of the love of a fellow-creature. How we crave for it! How miserable we should be, if we believed that no one loved us! Men, shut out from human kind—immured in prisons by the cruelty of their fellows—have been known to lavish their whole wealth of affection on some insignificant animal. Ay, love is the supreme need of the human heart; and to know that we are the object of an affectionate regard, has an ennobling effect upon the soul, and draws us up out of ourselves, and comforts and blesses us.

And, if so, brethren, what must it be to be made conscious of the fact that the greatest Being in the universe is regarding us with the tenderest emotion, and even longing to draw out from us a response to His love! It is in our sorrow that we learn the fact most distinctly. When the plant lies bare and wounded, and is most in need of help and comfort—then it is that the soft gentle dew of the divine-human sympathy comes down to refresh its exhaustion, and to restore it to life and strength.

To sum our subject up in few words. We have in heaven a great High Priest—Jesus, the Son of God. Possessed of all the attributes of the Godhead—present everywhere at the same moment of time—cognisant of all things—there is nothing He cannot do, when He has the will to succour and to bless us—and that will is never wanting. But combined with the power, is the capacity of sympathising. The Son of God is also Jesus the Son of Man; and as such, He cannot but be touched with a feeling of our infirmities—for He has had the fullest possible experience of human sorrow. There is no grief that He has not felt. From the throb of bodily pain and the languor of weariness, up to the keenest, the most appalling, mental anguish—He has tasted the full bitterness of the cup of suffering. Scorn and ridicule, the opposition of the world, the ingratitude of friends, the death of those dear to Him, the falling-away of those in whom He trusted, the horror of anticipated evil, the pang of temptation—He knows it all, for He has not forgotten it. It is graven deep on the eternal tablets of His memory. What, then, is your trouble? But whatever it may be, Jesus has been before you in it. And so He can be not merely kind and considerate, but sympathising.

Brethren, do you remember that beautiful hymn which begins “Thou knowest, Lord, the weariness and sorrow?” There is a stanza of it, which exactly expresses what I wish to say. It runs thus (the writer is speaking to Jesus):

“Thou knowest, not alone as God, all-knowing,
As *man*, our mortal weakness Thou hast proved.
On earth, with purest sympathies o’erflowing,
O Saviour, Thou hast wept and Thou hast loved :
And love and sorrow still to Thee may come,
And find a hiding-place, a rest, a Home.”

Yes, brethren, that is just it. Jesus is the righteous King, and as such we can trust Him, for He is the enemy of all evil ; the patron and protector of all that is true and pure and good. But we can also trust Him, with the most perfect confidence, in our human liability to suffering and sorrow, for it is another characteristic of the righteous King, that "He comes down like rain on the mown grass ; as showers that water the earth."



VI.

REPENTANCE A GIFT OF GOD.

“Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.”—
ACTS v. 31.

THE speaker of these words is the Apostle Peter. His audience is a conclave of ecclesiastics, with the High Priest at their head, who are calling him to account for his preaching in Jerusalem. The scene is a striking one; and the more so, if we remember what had taken place in the same city—and under somewhat similar circumstances—not so many weeks ago. Then, the Galilean fisherman, filled with selfish apprehensions for his own personal safety, cowered under the inquisitive remarks of a maidservant, and denied Jesus Christ with oaths and curses. Now, the same man stands boldly up before powerful officials, who hold his life in their hands, and who hated and crucified his Master, and, without the slightest hesitation, accuses them of that frightful act of judicial murder which was committed on Calvary. His language, too, about Jesus is as striking as the scene itself. He claims for Him the title of “Prince and Saviour,” by which we are to understand, not so much the royal power and authority which indubitably belong to Him, as the fact that He is the author, the

originator of salvation—the source from which salvation flows ; and that He is such, because He “gives repentance to Israel, and the forgiveness of sins.”

It is to the expression which I have just emphasised that I wish to direct your especial attention this morning. In one of my late discourses I did just speak, as you may remember, of the circumstance, that repentance is a divine gift. But I am anxious to speak about it again.

“Repentance,” then, I say, “is the gift of God.” The Lord Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on High, to give gifts to man—even to the rebellious—and this is one of them. And it is well for us that it should be so. With hearts like ours—so weak, so readily and so powerfully influenced by the things of this world, and so prone to form the most favourable estimate of ourselves—one of our chiefest spiritual perils arises from the possibility of self-deception. We may think that we have repented when, in point of fact, we have done nothing of the kind. Supposing then, brethren, that I am conscious of this danger—where am I to find solid ground to stand upon? Not in myself, clearly—for, knowing what I do, I distrust my own feelings, my own resolves, my own earnestness, my own apparent sincerity. But I find it in the assurance that He who alone knows the human heart, and alone knows how to deal with it, has this great boon in His hands to bestow upon those who ask for it ; and that He will not suffer me to be self-deceived, because “He *gives* repentance to Israel, and the forgiveness of sins.” Mark, then, I pray you, the reasonableness of the exhortation in our Prayer Book, “Wherefore, let us beseech Him to grant us true repentance, and His Holy

Spirit." But, enough of introduction ; I pass on to our main subject.

I.—I will throw my treatment of the subject into the form of a reply to a conceivable question. A man may say to us, " Well, I do hope that I have repented, but I am not quite sure—not quite easy upon the point. To tell you the truth, I find myself perpetually confessing, and perpetually repeating the same transgression. Is this (he asks) *true* repentance ? " Now, what reply shall we give to such an enquiry as this ? It is not a trifling enquiry. It touches, certainly, the comfort, and possibly, the salvation of the man. Let us consider then, God helping us, what view we ought to take of such a case : what answer we ought to give to such a question.

Now, there is one thing that we may be clear about—that wherever there is a true repentance, there there is also a sharp and decisive breaking-off from everything that may be described as an overt violation of a divine command. Should a man who has been accustomed to steal ; or another, who has been given to lying ; or another, whose besetting vice has been that of intoxication—tell us that they are weaning themselves, by degrees, from their old propensities ; the first affirming that he commits theft less frequently than he once did ; the second, that he lies far less often ; the third, that he gets drunk only now and then, and very much less frequently than he used to do : and should all of them express a hope that, by and by, they will be set free altogether from the tyranny of their bad habits ; and should they, on the ground of this partial reformation of theirs, claim to have been brought to a true repentance—the claim is one which no sensible person amongst us would

be willing to allow for a moment. We feel that where God has wrought a spiritual work in the soul, there there must be a clear and decided turning-away from all which is clearly and decidedly in opposition to the divine will. And we remember the statement of the Apostle, "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace." At the same time, we would, of course, not go so far as to deny that a child of God may fall, and fall grievously, into sin, from which he seemed to have wholly escaped. If we did deny it, we should find the facts against us. David, a good and holy man—a man characterised by the most passionate devotion to the personal God—was guilty of a crime so heinous, so revolting, that we scarcely dare even to speak of it. The noble Apostle Peter (as we have seen) was once betrayed into a terrible transgression. And so with a multitude of others. Clearly, then, a man may fall—and by the grace of God be forgiven; and repent and rise again, and be a wiser, if a sadder, man than he was before. But this falling must not be an habitual thing. There is no breaking-off of sin—bit by bit—as in the cases we have imagined. There can be no gradualness in the process. It is a sharp turning-round—a distinct severance—or else there is no true and real repentance at all in the case.

Now, so far, we have encountered no very great difficulty in our subject. I presume I have carried the convictions of all of you with me. But now comes another problem, not quite so easy for us to solve. There are certain offences—I suppose I may call them so—into the composition of which sinfulness unquestionably enters, but into which enters also, and sometimes very largely enters, the infirmity

of human nature. Say, for instance, wandering thoughts in prayer. In this offence there is a serious side, because our wandering thoughts savour more or less of irreverence towards the Great Being to whom our worship is addressed. In an approach to an earthly monarch—especially if we came into the royal presence in the hope of obtaining a boon—our attention would not easily be diverted from him: we should not turn aside, or glance aside, or cease to listen when he spoke; but when we appear in the audience-chamber of the King of kings, almost any trifling incident is sufficient to drag our minds down from heaven to earth, and to make us forgetful of the presence of Him who stands, as He Himself tells us, in the midst of the assemblies of His worshipping people.

Now, there is something wrong about this inability to realise the unseen God. Did we believe in Him as we should do; did we love Him as we should do; did we care for Him as we should do—irreverent inattention would become an impossible thing. There is, then, I say, a serious side to the question. But, on the other hand, some allowance is to be made for physical infirmity. If we are wearied—or if we are suffering—we find it difficult to keep our thoughts from wandering, even when they are engaged on the most important of all important occupations; and, again, if we have accustomed ourselves to let our imagination rove about at will when we are reading a secular book, the bad habit will not forsake us when we are reading the Scriptures. And so, perhaps it is not altogether unallowable to say that the offence which we are now considering is a sort of *composite affair*—made up partly of human frailty, and partly of human sin.

Or, to take another instance, there is the subject of bad temper—hasty or sullen or irritable temper, such as we often discover in the conduct of persons, of whom we cannot but believe that they are true and sincere followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here, again, I would have you observe that there are two sides to the subject. Temper is very largely a question of bodily constitution. Some persons seem to have nerves, and others to have none. One man is naturally placid, and scarcely anything will put him out. Another is jarred, and disturbed, and irritated by the most insignificant trifles. And temper is very largely a question of bodily health. A generally easy-natured and pleasant man may be rendered, every now and then, almost unbearable by an attack of a distressing and painful disease. Make allowance, then, I say: take into your account the fact that the natural dispositions of different men differ as widely as their complexion, and features, and stature; and that some, therefore, have difficulties in this direction, to which others are only in a slight degree exposed, if exposed at all. And yet, brethren, on the other hand, when we consider how much temper has to do with the happiness of families; how that happiness is not unfrequently wrecked by the perpetual bickerings that are going on in the household—by the collisions of will between some of the children, or between the parents and the children; how frequently those who put on a fair outside in society, and are all smiles and graciousness when in company with their neighbours, come home with a lowering brow, to bring a cloud into their homes, and to spread unhappiness and discomfort round them; and when we consider, too, how servants, and dependents, and subordinates, not unfrequently

have their lives made bitter to them by the snappish words and unreasonable treatment which they receive at the hands of their superiors ; and, above all, when we think of the discredit thus cast upon the name and the religion of Jesus Christ—especially in the estimation of the young, and of others who do not know enough of the human heart to know how much inconsistency can lurk even in the regenerate—when we think of all these things, we cannot but feel that indulgence in ebullitions of temper has that in it which partakes very largely—very largely indeed—of the nature of sin.

Here, then, we have another “composite” offence. Let us restrict ourselves to the consideration of it. Our imaginary questioner is a man with a temper, and he tells us that he is always repenting of those ebullitions of his and always repeating them ; and he begins to question whether he is a true penitent or not. He wants to know.

II.—Now, may we not say this first, that the presence of divine grace in the heart puts acquiescence in such a state of things as this altogether out of the question ? “Every man that hath hope in Christ purifieth himself, even as He is pure ;” in other words, the Christian sets before him the standard of the perfection of character exhibited in his divine exemplar, and will not rest satisfied until he attains to it. It is not enough for him to detach himself from gross and open sins, from those offences which are distinctly prohibited in the Word of God ; but he endeavours to get free from everything which carries in it the nature of sin ; from every inconsistency ; from every frailty ; from everything, in fact, which he feels is unlike the conduct of the Master whom he professes to serve. And here is a test by

which our questioner may try himself. *If he rests satisfied with things as they are*—if he acquiesces in them—either as thinking that his faults are trifles, or as believing that it is impossible for him to overcome them, then there is only too much reason to suspect that he is altogether a stranger to the spiritual life, and that he has to begin, in the matter of religion, from the very beginning. But there is hope, and good hope too, if we find him restless and uneasy; dissatisfied with himself; struggling and striving; falling, it is true, but yet rising again; and pushing on through the mire and slough, but with the face resolutely and persistently set in the direction of the golden gates of the heavenly city.

“But why,” it may be asked, “is his work so discouraging? why, after perhaps a lengthened period of Christian profession, is there so little of victory, and so much of defeat, in his life? Surely this is not as it ought to be.” No, it is not as it ought to be. If I read Scripture correctly, I find that, although provision is made for our restoration in case of fall, we have a right to expect to be kept from falling; and that if we are not kept from falling, the fault is our own. Says St. John, “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father.” There is the provision. But the Apostle speaks of Christian possibility in the former part of the verse—“These things write I unto you, that ye sin not.” It is a mistake, then, brethren, to take for granted—as I fear we oftentimes do—that we *must* fall into sin, and that there is no real help for it; on the contrary, we are to assume that we may be kept upright; that God intends us to be kept upright: in other words—that victory, and not failure, is the law of the spiritual life. “Why,

then," it may be asked, "is there so much of failure with us?" There are reasons for it, brethren, other than the reason of the supposed necessity of the case. Perhaps we have not been watchful enough. Our Lord has linked together—with an indissoluble bond of connection—watching and praying: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." If, then, we have not kept ourselves on the alert, and been careful to avoid the occasions of going wrong—how can we expect not to fall into the pit, when so many snares are laid for our feet? If we have not guarded the weak and insecure gate, where the enemy has often entered in before, what right have we to think that he will never come in again to work us mischief? Our fault, then, may have been a lack of vigilance. Or we may have trusted to our own strength of resolution—that broken reed on which so many have leaned, and found it go in, and pierce their hand with an almost incurable wound. Or, what is the most likely of all, we may have failed to make full proof of the power there is in Jesus Christ to save to the uttermost those who put their trust in Him. The tyro in music sits down before the keyboard of some vast cathedral organ, with its almost infinite capacities of combination and sound. What does he know about the wealth of the harmony contained in that splendid structure? Scarcely anything. But, as he advances in skill and knowledge, he is able to draw out more and more of the hidden sweetness and beauty; and yet, perhaps, after long years spent at his post, he feels that there are resources in the instrument which he never yet fathomed, recesses in the treasure-chambers of musical thought into which he has never yet been privileged to enter. So, perhaps, with us. We know

that Christ can do something for us—can do much for us—but *have we tried all that He is able to do?* He can save us from the gross sin—but can He not save us from all sin? Oh! brethren, what you and I really want is so to be lifted up by the vision—the exceeding glory—of our Divine Lord, that we shall dwell habitually in the region of the Spirit; and then it will be easy enough for us to cease from fulfilling the lusts of the flesh, the desires of our fallen and lower nature. Then shall we complain no longer that we are for ever repenting and repeating, repeating and repenting—but our path will be that of the “righteous man, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”

Brethren, there is a line to be drawn in the world. On the one side of it are those who, because they are poor and struggling, earnestly wish to be rich, or at least to obtain a competence; and those who think that health is the greatest boon that God can bestow, for they, poor things, are suffering from pain, or, may be, from incurable disease; and there are those who crave for honour, for they are lightly esteemed; and those who long for rest, for they are oppressed and beaten down by the incessant toil of the toilsome world. But on the other side of the line are men and women who, without despising cynically the comforts of life, *desire, above all other things, to be better than they are.* To this class I trust you and I may be said to belong. We desire—earnestly desire—to be better than we are. But, if so, we must put ourselves into the hands of Christ to make us such; and while we are in His hands, we must consent to leave ourselves there, in order that He may work His perfect work in our souls, and stamp the beauty and the glory of His own image and super-scription upon us.

VII.

ASHAMED OF CHRIST AND HIS WORDS.

“Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.”

—MARK viii. 38, and ix. 1.

WHAT I shall aim at, chiefly, in my sermon of to-night, will be the presentation of a single and simple thought—that of the danger of being ashamed of Jesus Christ. This will be what I may call my theme. And my justification for selecting it is to be found in the fact that we have had it suggested to us in the passage just quoted to you from the services of the day. Whether the danger in question besets one person more than another, or one period of life more than another, I shall not attempt to decide. It is enough for my purpose that some of us are exposed to it. Of course, the causes which keep men back from adhesion to Christ are very various—depending, as they do, upon peculiarities of temper and circumstances, and of antecedent habit. One man, for instance, is tied down by a secret lust, which he finds himself unable to break loose from at the Saviour's bidding;

another is too indolent to put himself to trouble in such matters ; whilst a third, it may be, is engrossed either by the attractions of money-making, or by the pursuit of worldly ambition. In each case there is some one thing which is the hindrance. But not unfrequently that one thing is the dread of the ridicule of the society in which we move. Our convictions are on the right side, but we stifle them—because we know what will be the consequence of making an open avowal of our faith in the Saviour. In other words, brethren, it is moral cowardice that prevents us from stepping over the boundary and offering our allegiance to Christ. We hold aloof, not because we are vicious, or depraved, or incapable of high feeling or noble thought, but simply because (the world round us being what it is) we are ashamed of Christ and of His words. Now, is it not so? But, of course it is. Everybody is aware of the fact. We find, then, here—I say—our subject for this evening ; and let us hope that, when we separate, we may all of us be the better for having seriously and earnestly considered it together.

I.—Now, it will be advantageous, I think, for us, for the proper discussion of our subject, that we should endeavour to trace the line of thought in the passage from which my text has been taken. And I must ask you to remember—for here we are liable to be misled by the Authorised Version—that the passage really ends with the end of the first verse of the ninth chapter, and that there is no true connection between what is said in it, and what is afterwards said about the Transfiguration. Just put a broad band of demarcation between the first and second verses of the ninth chapter, and regard the two narratives as being totally

distinct. Well, then, what is the line of thought which brings the Saviour to His statement about being ashamed of Him? and to His further statement about seeing the kingdom of God come with power? This is the question. Let us try to answer it.

The circumstances were these: the Lord Jesus Christ—feeling that the hour had come for the twelve disciples to make an open and distinct confession of His Godhead, and to receive His own personal endorsement of the doctrine, withdrew with them to a quiet spot in the neighbourhood of Cæsarea Philippi, where He could be free from the interruptions that always accompanied His movements whenever they were publicly known. For some time past—indeed, ever from the very beginning of His connection with these men—He had endeavoured to enable them to understand what we may call the “mystery of His person”—His true and eternal Sonship. But, of necessity, the process of education had been a slow one. Only by degrees—only step by step, little by little—could the light be let into the disciples’ minds. It had, however, been let in; and these twelve associates of Christ had now in them thoughts, surmises, ideas, convictions about their Master, which just needed to be brought to the surface, and put into shape, in order that the truth thus seen, and realised and grasped, might enter into and become the dominant force in their lives. Accordingly, the Lord begins by asking them to tell Him what is said about Him in the outer world. “Whom do men say that I am?” And on receiving their various replies, He suddenly turns upon them with the further question: “But whom say ye that I am?” The question—as I need not remind you—though perhaps it startled them at first,

produced the desired effect. It led them to compare the erroneous views of their contemporaries with the instruction which they had received from time to time on the subject from Jesus Himself. The train, long and laboriously laid, took fire in a moment, and the answer flashed out from the lips of the Apostle Peter : "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." This grand confession, brethren, Christ accepted. It was the confession, not of one man—though only one seems to have spoken—but of the whole body of the Apostles ; and it was a statement—and an accurate statement too—of the truth concerning the incarnate Son of God.

And now—the natural ferment of the disciples' minds having a little subsided—the Saviour begins to open His lips again. And what will He speak about ? "Surely," we say to ourselves, "He will discuss the greatness of His person, the mystery of His relation to the Father, the magnificence and glory of His kingdom, and the deep blessedness of those who have resolved to cast in their lot with Him at this early stage of His career." Such topics would seem to be in truest harmony with the grand announcement about Himself, which has been just made. But, singularly enough, He does nothing of the kind. His theme is His own rapidly approaching humiliation and passion. "From that time forth" (*i.e.*, after His unapproachable greatness had been distinctly revealed to them) "Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes ; and be killed, and be raised again the third day." How startling—how appalling—brethren, must have been the effect of such a statement as this upon the disciples ! It

must have come upon them like a thunderclap. It was difficult enough for them to understand that Messiah should suffer and die ; but that such a fate should befall one, who could claim equality with the unseen Jehovah Himself—who was, in the highest sense of the word, the Son of God—was past their comprehension, as it was altogether past their belief ; and they began to protest—Peter being again the spokesman of the rest. “ Be it far from Thee, O Lord ! this shall not be unto Thee.” I must ask you to recall to mind—for I cannot enter now into more detail—how severely Peter was rebuked ; and how the Lord gathered the whole body of the disciples together—not the Apostles only—in order to put them *all* right upon a question of such extreme importance. But there is one point which I am anxious to bring out distinctly, and it concerns that feeling of the Apostles which led them to repudiate so warmly their Master’s teaching about His suffering and death. Look at the matter closely, and you will see that they were ashamed of the Cross. Had Christ held out to them the prospect of an uninterrupted career of success for Himself and them, they would have been satisfied, even if they had heard of obstacles to be surmounted, and difficulties to be overcome ; but they shrank from the thought of connection with one who had to undergo rejection and scorn at the hands of the world, and ultimately to be put to death as a malefactor on a cross. “ Was such a thing necessary ? ” they would say. “ It was not necessary—it could not be necessary—it should not be necessary—they would not have it. Such a fate should not befall a Master, with whose fortunes they had been led to identify themselves.” In other words—they were ashamed of a crucified Master. A teaching Christ, a sym-

pathizing Christ, a ruling Christ, they would have gladly accepted ; but a crucified Christ—ah, that was another thing. The offence of the Cross had already begun in their hearts. You see then—I feel sure—the connection between the whole narrative and the first verse of our text—the verse in which our Lord speaks about being ashamed of Him. You see what Peter was in danger of, and why he was in danger of it, and why he needed warning. The point is so plain, that I need not dwell any further upon it. But I have the second verse of the text to discuss. I have to consider what it means, and why it was uttered ; and this I proceed to do in as few words as I can possibly employ.

What, then, are we to understand by the “coming of the kingdom of Christ?” Certainly not any one single definite event in the evolution of the ages ; but rather the beginning of that series of events which is to terminate in the setting up of the great white throne, and the judgment of the quick and the dead, and the cessation of conflict, and the final overthrow of evil, and final establishment of the unassailable supremacy of the good and the true throughout the wide universe of God. And if so, the first event may well be the destruction of Jerusalem, which our Lord in some of His concluding prophetic discourses obviously spoke of as the type and model of every one of His subsequent comings. Of this destruction of Jerusalem, not a few of the first disciples, as a matter of fact, were witnesses. They were living at the time at which Jesus uttered the words of our text ; they had not tasted of death when the kingdom of God came with power. And again, brethren, if it be as I have ventured to suppose, it is easy to see why our Lord should add this particular statement to His language of

warning. It was intended for the encouragement of His disciples. It is as if He said : " In a world, such as that in which you are living, you will be tempted by the pressure of opposition, by the sheer force of ridicule, to give up your confidence in Me. But cast your glance onward ! The time is hastening on when the first of that long series of events, which is to terminate in the full establishment of My kingdom—shall take place. Even at that early period it shall be distinctly seen what I am, what My power is, how I am able to overthrow and crush opposition, and how much better it is to be on My side, than to be ranged in the ranks of those who stand up against Me. Be not, then, afraid ; neither be ye dismayed. Be not ashamed of Me and of My words. I assure you that all these things will certainly come to pass ; and, as a proof of the truth of what I say, the eyes of some of you, who are now here listening to Me, shall behold the beginning of them. ' Verily, I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.' " So far, brethren, we have been occupied with an exposition of the passage. Let us spend the time that remains in endeavouring to understand how far you and I, in the present day, may be practically concerned in the matter before us.

I take for granted—as I said at the outset—that there is such a thing as being ashamed of Christ ; and not only being ashamed of Christ, but—mark the addition—"being ashamed of His words." About this thing let us ask and answer three questions—What is it ? Why is it ? And what consequences does it entail ?

I.—First, then, *What is it?* My answer is an obvious one. To act in any way or at any time in opposition to our conscience, because we dread the ridicule of the world—that is to say, of the society in which we move; or for the same reason, to conceal our convictions, when we know they ought to be avowed; to be in company, for instance, where religion is held up to scorn; where the infidel sentiment is uttered, or the unclean or unseemly jest goes round, and to enter no protest—and so, by our silence, to let it to be supposed that, although we profess to be Christians, yet the honour of our Divine Master is nothing to us—all this, brethren, is to “be ashamed of Christ.” And as to being “ashamed of His words,” what is it, but to pare away the edges of unpalatable doctrine, so as to make Christ’s statements square with our own views of God and man; to represent His sterner and more stringent precepts, as if they were too overstrained for practical acceptance; and, generally, to deal with the Scripture, which is His word—His utterance—the expression of His thought and will—as if, instead of being a strong factor in human life—an influence which should enter into and mould everything—it were nothing better than a soft mass of pulpy matter, which will take any shape we please, and run readily into any mould whatever, which we may see fit to prepare for it—what is this, brethren, but to be “ashamed of Christ’s words?” You know what I am talking about. It is a danger that we are, all of us, exposed to—even we, who seem to be protected by our clerical position and ministerial responsibilities. For all of us there are times when man is likely to become too much to us, and God in Christ is likely to become too little.

II.—In the next place, *Why is this so?* What is the cause of the shame that professing Christians sometimes feel with regard to their relationship to Jesus Christ? I trace it to that which was the cause of St. Peter's fall—for fall it was—as recorded in the passage before us—a shrinking from the shame of the Cross; a sentiment of humiliation at the idea of serving a Master who was crucified. [There are leaders of religious thought in the world who exercise a mighty influence over masses of their fellow-men. Amongst the Mohammedans, for instance, there is the prophet of Mecca; amongst the teeming millions of China, the philosopher Confucius; amongst an even greater number of the human race, Gautama the Buddha. ~~Unless, however, I am much mistaken,~~ you will never find any of the followers of these men ashamed of their leader. On the contrary, they are ready on every reasonable occasion to proclaim their adhesion to him, and to glory in the name they bear. But had Mahomet, Confucius, Buddha, been put to an ignominious death, as Jesus was, the case, ~~I suspect,~~ would, *no doubt* be widely different. It is the Cross then, ~~brethren,~~ that is the stumbling-block. But trace the matter a step further: *Why* should the Cross be a stumbling-block? For this simple reason—that, although it bears witness to the unspeakable love of God, it bears no less distinct a witness to the sin, and the unworthiness of man. For what must our natural condition be, which called for such a remedy to put it straight? What must our guilt be in God's sight, which required the blood of such a sacrifice to wash its stains away? In this point, ~~brethren,~~ lies the secret of human dislike to a crucified Christ—just as in this point lies the secret of the Christian devotion to Him.]

Some years ago a Scripture reader, whom I knew well, was taunted with being the worshipper of a "bleeding Jesus Christ" (I dare not give the full coarseness of the expression) "hanging up by the legs and arms." And I myself, since I entered upon my ministry in this place, had a letter sent to me, the only merit of which was that the writer was not mean enough to write anonymously, a letter, in which the same charge—with even more coarseness and brutality—was brought against me, as a preacher of a "crucified" Christ. Ah, brethren, you may lay your finger there on the explanation of the whole matter. The Cross stirs up the virulence of Christ's enemies. It is an offence to them, whilst His friends thankfully and joyfully sing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain—to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

III.—One word more will complete my subject ; and when I have spoken it, I shall have done. I have just to give an answer to the third question : *What consequences will the being ashamed of Christ in this world entail ?* That Christ will be ashamed of us in the world to come. And this, I would have you to observe, will not be a mere act of retaliation : it will be a simple sending a man off to the company of those to whom he naturally belongs—to association with whom his character fits him. [Suppose, brethren, I had a benefactor to whom I owed everything in life ; who, at infinite cost and pain and self-sacrifice, had saved me from the consequence of my misdoing ; who was noble in himself, and noble in his enduring and unchanging kindness to me—and suppose that I, because I was thrown in with some poor fools who could not endure my benefactor's virtues, became

ashamed of him, and refused to recognise him when I was in company with these friends of mine, what would you say about me? Would you be able to find language sufficiently strong to express what you thought about the meanness of my nature, and the disgracefulness of my conduct? And if heaven be, brethren, what we believe it to be—the abode of the assembled good, and true, and noble and pure spirits that have ever lived upon earth—if it be a place, where nothing mean, or base, or grovelling, or cowardly, can possibly find a home—how can it open its portals to one who has not learnt, whilst upon earth, sufficient appreciation of the moral greatness of Christ, or sufficient gratitude and love to preserve him from the temptation of being “ashamed of Christ and of His words?”



VIII.

THE JEWISH FUTURE.

“Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.”—ACTS i. 11.

HERE is something peculiarly interesting about the interval of time which elapsed between the Resurrection and the Ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. During that period, our Blessed Master was employed in other ways, no doubt, about which we have no information, but, certainly, in the important work of training His disciples to dispense with His visible presence, and of qualifying them to be trustworthy and resolute witnesses to the great fact of His rising again from the dead. At length, the end of the period drew nigh. The Apostles had received directions to meet their Lord outside the walls of Jerusalem; and we picture them to ourselves as preparing, very early one morning—before the break of day—to obey the command. They file out from the eastern gate of the city, walk slowly and in silence down the path that leads to the brook Kedron, then cross the narrow stone arch that spans the stream, and begin to climb—by the irregular road—to the summit of the Mount of Olives. On their way they have to pass, of course, the gate of the Garden of

Gethsemane ; and as they do so, their minds revert to that awful night when the Lord Jesus lay groaning, in His mysterious agony, under the shadow of the hoary olive-trees and when they stood by, unable to help or even to comprehend Him. Presently, they are on the top of the mount. Pausing for a moment to look down upon the mass buildings lying at their feet, and on the white gleam of the Temple rising ghost-like up into the air—they turn round again, and slowly pursue their journey. Ere long, they are conscious of the presence of the Saviour amongst them. He has come—as His wont is at this time—suddenly, and without a note of warning. He places Himself at their head, and leads them on, until, when they are within a short distance of the village of Bethany, He bids them halt, and gather in a circle round Him. They do so. And now, brethren, let us just look at them for a moment. They are in a sequestered and quiet spot. At a distance behind them lies slumbering the great and wicked city which rejected Jesus, and crucified Him. A little beyond them, and behind a long, low ridge, nestles the little village of Bethany. But no stranger is near ; and the fresh, cool air of early morning is blowing over the downs, and the sun begins to rise, and tinges the grey of the dawn with rosy hues ; and the birds, welcoming the approach of day, are stirring and twittering on the boughs, when the little group of men—the sharers in the temptations and trials of their Master—approach Him in order to receive His final instructions, and to take their leave of Him, before He ascends to the right hand of God.

Of much that passes between them we hear nothing. One question and one answer only are recorded : the

question, whether He intended to restore again, at this time, the kingdom to Israel: the answer, that it was better for them to attend to their own immediate duty, than to enquire too curiously into the secret counsels of heaven. When this answer has been given, the Ascension begins. On previous occasions—during the forty days—the Saviour had been accustomed to appear suddenly, and to depart suddenly. Now, His movements are gradual. Calmly and majestically (so that all have the opportunity of observing and watching what is taking place), He rises into the air—the eyes of the disciples following Him as He goes up. As far as we can understand the narrative, no angels come upon the scene, until the bright, luminous Shekinah-cloud floats in below the Saviour, and hides Him from sight. Till then, He is still alone with His disciples, and His looks are bent upon them, and His hands upraised in the attitude of benediction, as long as He sees them, and they Him.

Is it to be wondered at, brethren, that the disciples continued gazing for some time after the Lord had entirely disappeared? I think not. But perhaps they continued gazing too long. Their attitude implied, perhaps, a tendency to inaction, a shrinking from work, a desire to enter into glory at once, without treading the rough and narrow path that leads to it; and it was this which exposed them to the gentle but decided rebuke which they were fated to receive. That rebuke proceeds from two angels, who first recalled the minds of the disciples to earth, and then—for their encouragement—informed them that this same Jesus, whom they had seen taken up from them into heaven, should so come in like manner as they had seen Him go into heaven.

Let us make it our object now, to consider this

angelic announcement, with a somewhat close and careful attention.

I.—In the first place, then, there is something announced, which is perfectly clear and distinct. The ascending Christ is also the returning Christ. He has gone away only for a time. He will come again. About that point there is, and there can be, no manner of doubt. But equally certain does it seem to be, that the circumstances of His return will correspond very closely with those of His departure. When He comes, He will come *personally*—not by influence merely—not by deputy (if I may say so)—as when the Holy Spirit of God descended to take the place of Christ, and to carry on His work—but *personally*, and visibly—in a body, glorified, of course, but palpably and unmistakably human. But there is also another feature of interpretation (which I suggest with some hesitation, because its outlines are by no means clear and decided)—but which yet I myself feel a little inclined to adopt. It seems to me to be, at least, possible that the language of the angels is intended to suggest the idea that the resemblance between the departure and the return will extend to persons and to place; in other words, that Jesus, when He comes back, will come back to the children of Israel (represented by the little crowd gathered there below Him on the Mount of Ascension), and that He will come back to the very spot—the Mount of Olives—from which He went up to the right hand of the Majesty on High. Before you reject this idea as certainly fanciful, and possibly absurd, just be so good, Christian brethren, as to listen to what I have to say in defence of it.

That there is something remarkable about the Jews, no

one will be inclined to deny, except those who are totally unacquainted with the subject. The nation has been broken into fragments, and those fragments have been crushed and ground by the attrition of most severe and tremendous persecutions for centuries together; and yet the nation retains, in the midst of it all, an absolutely indestructible vitality. Any other people under the sun, under such circumstances, would have disappeared from off the face of the earth; but there are now eight millions, at least, of the descendants of Abraham—if not ten—amongst us at the present day. They are scattered, of course; but the mark of their origin is still broadly stamped upon them. Found everywhere, but nowhere coalescing with the people amongst whom they dwell; preserving their ancient customs, and if not always their ancient faith, at least their pride of race, they present a phenomenon, from which no intelligent observer of the condition of mankind can thoughtlessly turn away. Perhaps it may be said: “The fact is a singular one; but it is nothing more. Such a thing might conceivably happen for once.” Well, but even granting this—the singularity is singularly enhanced by the well-known and indubitable fact, that the history of the Jews—even in its minuter details—has been the subject of prophetic utterances, dating hundreds and hundreds of years before the events themselves occurred. On these prophetic utterances was based the profound statement of a Jewish Rabbi—uttered during the fearful persecutions of Ferdinand of Spain: “We are a nation, on whom rest both blessing and curse. Now you Christians wish to exterminate us; but you will not succeed: for there is a blessing resting on us. And a time is coming, when you will try to elevate

us ; and, again, you will not succeed, for we are under a curse."

But there is also, brethren, another remarkable circumstance to which I am anxious to direct your attention. The story of the land of this people is almost as strange as the story of the people itself. Look at that land—at its natural fertility ; at its position, between the East and the West, offering a most commodious meeting-point for the two ; lending itself freely and readily to active commercial enterprise—would it not seem the most unlikely thing in the world that such a land, so situated, should remain for centuries practically, to all intents and purposes, uninhabited and unused ? Yet, brethren (though matters are slightly mending now), yet, so it has been in the past. The country has been barren, desolate, almost entirely useless. Again, it might be urged, "This is all true enough. The circumstance is strange. But strange things do happen sometimes ; and this is one of them—and there is no reason for attaching especial significance to it." We may reply, "But it is surely significant that this state of things also has been the subject of a prophetic utterance, and was foretold many and many a long year before it actually occurred."

Here then, brethren, is a people with a history, and a land with a history. Here is a people spoken of in prophecy, and land spoken of in prophecy. Here is a people waiting for a land, and a land waiting for a people. Centuries ago, the two—the land and the people—were associated. Is it altogether out of the range of possibility—nay, is it altogether so very unlikely—that the two may—at some future and not so very distant time—meet together again ? May it not be that, in the present state of human affairs,

political complications might arise which should open the way, and (almost before we know where we are) the nation may be settled again in the country which God gave to Abraham and his seed for ever. But, after all, conjectures are valueless. The appeal must be to Scripture. I will quote, then, two or three passages. The one, about the national existence of Israel; the other, about the country. "Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day; and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night: which divideth the sea, when the waves thereof roar: the Lord of hosts is His name! If these ordinances depart from before Me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before Me for ever." What can that mean? "The Christian Church," say some. But the prophet—the prophet is Jeremiah—says, "the seed of Israel:" and even if the term "seed of Israel" could stand for the Christian Church, how can the Christian Church be said to be a nation before God for ever? The Christian Church described as a nation! The thing is scarcely possible. Why should we not take the literal, the simple, the obvious interpretation—which informs us, or at least leads us to infer that, in the purpose of God, this people of Israel has a national existence even now; and that the national existence of Israel will some day become an accomplished fact before the eyes of mankind? So much for the people. Now for the land. At the very end of the prophecies of Amos, I read this: "I will bring again the captivity of My people of Israel; and I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God." Now, surely, brethren, here "Israel"

must mean "Israel," and the land must mean Palestine. The Christian Church has no land which God has given her: the Christian Church belongs to all lands. Of course, if you allow yourself to spiritualise the statements of Scripture, when they are clearly capable of a literal interpretation, you can make anything mean anything—and one drifts out at once on a sea of uncertainty. We, however will take these two statements of the prophetic Scriptures, according to the plain and simple meaning of the words of which they are composed, and will conclude that Israel, as a nation, will one day (we know not when) be gathered together again in the land of their forefathers.

So far, then, so good—supposing you agree with me. We are approaching a solution of our problem. Israel is in Palestine. But Israel may be in Palestine, and nothing particular happen. Is there, then, any reason to believe that any remarkable and supernatural event will occur, when the ancient nation is re-instated in the ancient country? I refer you, for an answer, to the closing chapters of the Prophet Zechariah. The passage is rather long. I cannot venture to quote much of it. But this I may say—that the prophet refers to a time obviously in the future—when "the Spirit of grace and of supplication shall be poured out on the tribes of Israel" (for they are gathered together in their land: and are known by their old tribal distinctions); "and they shall look on Him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, and be in bitterness for Him—as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." The same sacred writer also tells us (he has just been speaking of the Lord): "His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the East."

Unless, then, I am mistaken—the prophets affirm that there will be a personal coming of Jesus Christ the Lord to the Mount of Olives—the place from which He ascended : that He will come there for the deliverance of the people of Israel—then gathered together from all lands and settled in their own country, as it were, to receive Him ; and that the effect of His coming will be, to bring them to repentance and to the acknowledgment of Him as Messiah, whom they once rejected as an impostor, and cast out, and crucified on the Hill of Calvary. And all this coincides with the statement of the angels—“This same Jesus shall so come in like manner, as ye have seen Him go into heaven.” But yet again, it might be, of course, that the Jews should accept Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah, and no great and important results accrue to the world at large. Here, however, St. Paul steps in to enlighten us. He tells us (in the eleventh chapter of his Epistle to the Romans) that the receiving of them—*i.e.*, the people of Israel—shall be, to the nations of the earth, as resurrection from the dead. He could not employ more graphic or striking language to describe the effect that will be produced upon the world at large by the national conversion of Israel to the faith of the crucified Man of Nazareth.

II.—I must now desist from my argument, and beg your attention, in conclusion, to a brief, practical appeal arising from it. There is a society which holds the views which I have been endeavouring to advocate this evening. It is based on the strong persuasion—that the future of Israel is a matter of such extreme importance, that it always ought to be kept full in view by the Christian Church ; and that everything should be done, that can possibly be done, to

help forward the cause of God in that particular direction. Not ignoring other societies, or willing for a moment to depreciate them—but working in closest harmony with all which propagate the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ—it yet claims for itself a position of a unique character, and of singular value. And for this reason. If it succeeds in leavening the Christian Church with what may be called “its particular view,” but what many of us believe to be the true Scriptural view—it will have succeeded in calling forth a volume of earnest, believing prayer on behalf of the restoration of Israel, that great event in which the spiritual fortunes of the whole world may be said to hinge. Is this a trifle, brethren, this outburst of prayer for such an object? Assuredly not. God, in His condescending wisdom, suspends the coming of the event on the petitions of His Church. You and I may accelerate its coming by our earnest intercession; or we may retard its coming, by withholding our intercession through coldness and indifference. This, then, is no trifling matter, brethren—this call to prayer. It is a matter which I am very anxious to be permitted to press upon you. Not neglecting, of course, other intercessory prayer, I think we ought to put this in the foremost place. There are many points of view from which it would be possible to commend the Society to you. But more than all, we are anxious to use these anniversaries as a means of impressing upon ourselves, and others, the fact—that, in the opportunity of praying for Israel, we have the best opportunity of advancing the glory of God, and the wellbeing of our fellow-men.

It is strange, brethren, how strikingly this Jewish question has begun to force its way to the front, of late years. Not

so long ago all who should take the views which I have been advocating, would be looked upon as a set of contemptible religious "faddists." Now popular novelists introduce the subject of the restoration of Israel into their novels. And statesmen begin to think of the granting of Palestine to the people who formerly possessed it, as a possible solution of their difficulties. And influential journalists—gentlemen, assuredly, not leaning to evangelical views—can write thus (as the *London Spectator* did, not so long ago): "While the question"—that of the restoration of the Jews to Palestine—"has not yet come within the range of practical politics, yet it has ceased to be (what it would have been thought fifty years ago, by all except a few students of prophecy) "ridiculous."

Well, and what shall we do? Rouse ourselves, I should say—God helping us—to greater interest than ever in the future of Israel. If there are any amongst those whom I now address, who have not yet carefully considered the subject in the light of Scripture—may I urge upon them to do so? Let them, at all events, look upon that as a Christian duty—under present circumstances.

And to those who already discern the deep importance of the Jew; his exceptional position in the divine plans and purposes—I would venture to say "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem—more earnestly; more persistently; more hopefully—than ever; for, by so doing, you will contribute largely to the speedier incoming of that bright and happy time, when the knowledge of God in Christ shall 'cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea.'"

IX.

THE

PROMISE OF FUTURE EXPLANATION.

“Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.”—JOHN xiii. 7.

SUPPOSE that the Saviour, in uttering these words, referred, in the first instance, to the act of washing His disciples' feet. It is impossible, He implies, for Peter (for it is to Peter that the words are addressed) to understand the full significance of that act, under the circumstances in which he happens at the moment to be placed. At some future period his spiritual position will be altered, and then he will find no difficulty in fathoming his Master's purpose, and in justifying his Master's wisdom. But, although the Saviour thus referred, primarily, to that greater enlightenment which the Apostle would receive after the events of the crucifixion, and after the descent of the Holy Ghost, His words were doubtless intended to have a much wider scope, and a much more extensive application. His dealings with His people are frequently incomprehensible. They provoke questioning, and sometimes even misgiving. The mind demands an explanation, where no explanation at present can or will be given. And Christ, looking down the long vista of the

ages, and foreseeing all the mental perplexity into which His faithful followers would be thrown by His treatment of them, challenges their confidence in the words of our text. Let them trust Him : let them credit that He makes no mistakes. Now, it is true, they cannot see. A veil of mystery hangs, necessarily, over His dealings with them. But let them believe where there is no open vision. The time is coming when the veil shall be lifted, and the mystery removed, and all things be made plain. "What I do thou knowest not now ; but thou shalt know hereafter."

I propose to arrange what I have to say this morning upon the simple lines of a twofold division of the subject. We will consider, in the first place, this saying of our Lord in its application to the circumstances of Peter and the other disciples—on the occasion of the Last Supper ; and we will consider, in the second place, its application to ourselves, and to all the successive generations of the Christian Church.

I.—First, then, the application of this statement to Peter and his fellow-disciples. Now, you will remember, of course, that, at the close of the Supper, Jesus rose from the table, and, laying aside His upper garments, prepared Himself to wash the disciples' feet. "A singular step to take,"—we might say—"a strange reversal of their relative positions. He is the Master—and such a Master ; and they are the disciples—the servants—or, at best, the humble friends of Christ. Has He, for the moment, and in an access of unusual humility, forgotten His own dignity, and descended to the depths of an unseemly and unnecessary self-abasement? No ; not so, brethren. St. John tells us, as if to guard us against such a supposition, that the

thought of His mysterious relation to the Father was never more distinctly present to the mind of Jesus than it was at that time. "Supper being ended—Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God" (mark these words I pray you); "He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments; and took a towel, and girded Himself. After that He poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded." With such calm, settled, deliberate purpose, with such complete recollection of the mystery of His relation to the Father, was the thing done by Jesus Christ.

But you can easily understand the perplexity of the disciples. Had such a step been taken in the earlier days of their acquaintance with Christ, in the time when—as we suppose—they entertained a very imperfect apprehension of His real character and pretensions, they would, even then, have been filled with surprise. But now they *know who He is*. They have acknowledged Him to be—they believe Him to be—"the Christ, the Son of the living God." And that He should stoop from His height, and condescend to such a lowly office for their sakes, is an idea which they know not how to grasp. They sit round the room, fascinated with astonishment, motionless, dumb—not daring, of course, to oppose their Master's will, and yet, in their secret hearts, half suspecting that something is wrong—that the Lord Jesus, for once, has forgotten Himself and descended too low. In the midst of a dead silence, broken only by the plashing of the water, and by the rustle of the Saviour's movements, He goes round the

group, kneeling down before one and another, and washing their feet. Strange sight! No wonder the disciples marvelled at it. After two or three, as it appears, have thus been dealt with, Christ comes to Simon Peter. Then the pent-up astonishment of the disciples found utterance. True to his impulsive nature, Peter burst out with the feelings which have been swelling in his breast: "Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?" The question—or rather the objection—was not a right one. It implied that Jesus did not quite know what He was doing. For the moment, Peter put his judgment above the judgment of Christ, arraigning the propriety or the wisdom of his Master's actions. However, he is gently answered in the words of our text. He is assured that, although he cannot see the reason of the Lord's procedure now, he will be enabled thoroughly to understand it hereafter. And is not the Apostle satisfied with this assurance? No! Still convinced that he is right, and that his Master is wrong; still believing that he ought, for that very Master's own sake, to resist His purposes of self-abasement, he positively declines to submit to the washing of his feet. The other disciples have done so, it is true; but he, for his part, will not allow the Lord to demean Himself. If he is wrong, he is sorry for it; but he can never consent to be a party to the degradation of the Son of God. "Thou shalt never wash my feet." And now, brethren, the time is come for stronger measures. The gentle expostulation, the kindly assurance, have failed in their effect; and Peter's self-will—if he continue in it—will have the effect of detaching him from his interest in Christ. So the Saviour says more sternly, or,

at least, with more of solemn warning in His tones, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me." Ah! the simple sentence was enough. The bare idea of having no part with His divine Master was more than the mind of the affectionate and devoted disciple could bear. He is broken down in a moment; his opposition gives way: his pride and self-will and self-complacency disappear. Anything—not to be separated from Christ! And passing from one extreme to another, he cries out, in his distress and repentance, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head."

Such is the narrative to which our text belongs. Such were the circumstances of that remarkable act of humiliation to which our Saviour descended when He took a bason, and girded Himself with a towel, and went round, kneeling down before His twelve Apostles (and one of them a false Apostle), washing their feet. Now, what was the Saviour's intention in this act? Probably He had many reasons; but we can immediately discover two.

In the first place, He wished to teach His disciples a lesson of true brotherly love. "I have given you an example," He says, "that ye should do as I have done to you." True love, brethren, leads to the sacrifice of self. The man, in whom is the Spirit of Christ, is willing to humble himself for the good of others, and for the good of the whole body; to be held, if need be, of no account; to fill lowly offices of service, which no one else will take; to be a hewer of wood or drawer of water in the temple of the Lord; to give up his own preferences; to surrender his own prejudices; to make way and room for others; and all for the good of the

brethren. These things (I think), and such as these, are what Christ indicates, when He says, "If I, then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet." He is not speaking, of course, of the external act. His own act was symbolical. But He alludes to that spirit of genuine self-sacrifice, of true self-abasement for the good of others, which He expects to find in all those who, in deed and in truth, are His followers and disciples.

In the next place (for this first lesson was intelligible and obvious enough), our Lord is preparing the way by this symbolical act for the right understanding of the mystery of His crucifixion. You remember, of course, that the great difficulty of the disciples was, to reconcile the dignity of Christ's person, as the acknowledged Son of God, with the extreme lowliness of the act of washing their feet. Precisely the same difficulty, only in a far graver and far more serious form, would meet them on the Mount of Calvary. If He is the Son of God—if all the highest honours of heaven are His—how are they to understand the utter humiliation implied in the taunts and the buffetings, in the scourge and the blows, in the cross and the agony, and the death, and the grave? How can the two things be reconciled—His greatness on the one side, with His degradation on the other? But, as you see, He has prepared them to encounter the difficulty. In the solitude and quiet of that upper chamber—on the night of the betrayal—a scene was enacted, which corresponded in a remarkable manner with the painful scenes of Calvary. What did it mean? It meant the self-surrender, the self-abasement, of the

highest—for the sake of the lowest. And this, on the larger and grander scale, was precisely the meaning of Calvary. And as the disciples stood on the Mount with wondering, awe-struck gaze—witnessing from a distance the sufferings and death of their beloved Master—we might almost imagine them saying—if they were not too troubled and perplexed to say it—“Ah! we see now the meaning of that washing of our feet; we see what the Lord intended to teach us: even that there are no depths to which a divine love will not descend for the rescue and the blessing of those who are the objects of it. The suffering, the cross, the death—mysterious as they are, we understand them now. The God-man, in His deep love, is willing to submit to all, if only by submitting He may bring His people to happiness and heaven and Himself.”

II.—We pass on now to the discussion of the second part of our subject—the application of the statement of the text to our own circumstances, and to the circumstances of the successive generations of the Christian Church. “What I do thou knowest not now.” “*Why not?*” we ask. Because, in the very nature of things, such explanation is impossible. I suppose, brethren, that even if God were to undertake to explain to us His mighty plan, embracing, as it does, not us and our interests only, but also the interests of the countless masses of His people, and the interests of the Church of Christ throughout all ages—we, on our side, could not undertake to comprehend it. Even in worldly things it is perilous to pronounce before the time. It is foolish to criticise whilst a process is going on. We stand by,

for instance, as breadth after breadth issues from the loom of some skilful weaver; and seeing only a portion of the fabric, we puzzle ourselves as to what the pattern may be. One portion flows out under the workman's hand, and we think we understand the design; but another appears, and its appearance overthrows our first conclusion; then issues a third—and now all that we have believed or imagined before, is shown to be a mistake. We have formed conjectures, and our conjectures have been wrong. And we come, at last, to the determination to wait until the process is finished, and the work is complete, before we venture to pronounce an opinion. But, if it be foolish, brethren, in the case of the things of this world, to form a judgment without having all the materials of judgment before us—surely it is much more foolish to do so in the case of the things of God. Such is the constitution of our nature, and such is the position in which we are at present placed, that we cannot “know,” we cannot understand, what our Lord is doing with us now. We must leave it to Him to explain at a time when we, in altered circumstances, and amidst the enlightenment of another scene, are able to comprehend.

“What I do thou knowest not now.” *Why not?* Because it is not well for thee to know. We are here, Christian brethren, in a state of discipline. We are here in the school of Christ—some on a higher form, some on a lower—learning our lessons; learning that grandest of all lessons—to say, “Thy will be done.” If the Lord were to make everything clear and plain, the benefit of discipline would be lost. There would be no room for

faith and patience; no opportunity for hope. God is teaching us to trust Him: but there is no trusting where we can see. And it is therefore absolutely necessary, for the purposes of moral discipline, that God should give us no account of His matters in the present state of existence. Why, what father amongst us would like his young child to demand an explanation of the reason of every action and movement, and to withhold his confidence until that explanation were given? You would say to such a child: "I can give a reason, if you like; but I do not choose to do so. I expect you not only to obey me, but also to trust me, without the rendering of a reason. It is a fair demand that I make. You are bound to believe in my love for you, in my care over you, in my wisdom in planning and contriving for you—and all without explanation." And should we not feel that, if a child under such circumstances resolutely refused to trust, his heart had become estranged and alienated, and his love turned away from his earthly parent? I do not see why we should not apply such reasoning to the matter as it stands between us and our Father in heaven. Not that He would be harsh or severe with us: far from it. "He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are but dust"—frail flesh and blood. But we can imagine Him saying to us: "Poor creatures of clay, crushed before the moth; I understand your perplexities and your sorrows: I sympathise with you in them. I know that no trouble for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous. I understand the smart of affliction. Learn, then, to trust Me. I cannot explain everything to you now, nor would it be well for you that I should do so; but I will explain by and by.

Meantime, trust Me ; believe in My wisdom, in My love, in My power ; believe that I am doing all things for the best—for *your* best ; for, indeed, whatever appearances may say, ‘I make all things work together for good for them that love Me and serve Me.’”

And surely, Christian brethren—and this is my last thought—there is something very touching and tender in the statement of our text. You will have noticed the condescension of it. We have, of course, no right to demand an explanation, either now or hereafter ; but Christ is aware that our hearts long to have matters cleared up ; and He promises an ultimate gratification of our natural longings. “You shall not be left in ignorance. When it is possible—when it is well for you and for others that you should know—*then* you shall know.” And you will have noticed also the gracious familiarity with which He treats these men. “I cannot take you into My entire confidence now—circumstances will not admit of it ; but I will do so when the fitting time comes. In the next world ye shall have the fullest revelation about yourselves, about Me, about others, about the mysteries of My rule of the world in which ye live. ‘What I do ye know not now ; but ye shall know hereafter.’”



X.

THE PRECIOUS BLOOD OF CHRIST.

“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were redeemed . . . by the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot.”—1 PET. i. 18, 19.

IT is hard to understand these words, brethren, except by supposing them to have reference to the sacrificial system of the Jews. The epistle, from which they are taken, was addressed, if not to a community consisting of Jewish Christians, at least to a community largely leavened with Jewish ideas. When, therefore, the congregation listened to such a statement as that I have just quoted, there was only one direction, one would think, in which their minds could possibly travel. There would rise up before them the well-known scene of the Passover—the selection of the innocent and unblemished victim, the slaying of it, the sprinkling of its blood, and all the privileges and blessings which the sprinkling was supposed to convey to the people of God. These ideas the Christian listeners would transfer to themselves. They too had been made partakers of the redemption, but of a spiritual one. For them too, a Lamb without blemish and without spot had been slain, and it was by the efficacy of His death that their deliverance had been effected. Were they washed from the pollution of

their sins, and rescued from their power? Were they forgiven by God, and accepted into His favour? had they been transferred from the bondage of a cruel tyrant, to the rule of a Master, whose service is perfect freedom?—all was owing to the precious blood of Jesus Christ, and to nothing else. Yes! as the words of our text sounded in the ears of these hearers and friends of St. Peter, their minds must have been filled with the thought of sacrifice.

But this, I suppose, brethren, none of you will be inclined to dispute. And I have spoken as I have—not so much for the sake of combating mistaken notions, as of introducing the subject of sacrifice, which I wish to consider with you, at least at the outset of my discourse. To this subject, then, let us turn without any further delay.

I.—*Sacrifice ! atonement !* weighty words ! Let us do our best to understand them. There is a mystery about sin. We do not know all that sin is. Something we know, of course. But what is its origin, what is its true nature, what is its ultimate consequence—these are subjects we cannot really understand. Seeing then that there is a mystery about sin itself, we ought not to be surprised that there is mystery about God's method of dealing with it. But although there is much that we do not comprehend in the subject of sin, there is also much that is plain enough. This, for instance. That when we have done a wrong thing, and have come to realise that it is a wrong thing—our conscience, especially if the offence be of a serious kind, is greatly troubled and pained. Let a man commit a murder—well, that is an extreme supposition—let a man commit a fraud, or, in a moment of ungoverned passion or

appetite, inflict a great wrong upon a fellow-creature—as soon as the passion has passed, and the sinfulness of the deed comes home to him, he would give worlds, if he had them, that the deed should be undone. And this feeling of his, I would have you observe, is quite irrespective of consequences. He is not thinking of what he himself shall have to suffer as the result of wrong-doing. He is thinking of *the wrong-doing itself*: and he wishes—earnestly wishes—that the deed had never been done. Such a reversal, however, of the order of events being obviously impossible (for God Himself cannot cause that what has taken place should not have taken place)—his next wish is that, by the making amends, by compensation of some kind or other, the deed should be cancelled by the obliteration of its effects, and should become as though it had not been done at all.

Here, brethren, you have the principle of that longing to make atonement for sin, which is a sort of instinct in every human heart, when it is awakened to understand the evil of sin. “I cannot undo the thing! But I will, if I can, destroy the effects of it. I will make it as though it had not been done.”

But now comes the question—“is this cancelling, this nullifying of sin by compensation, possible?” Some persons answer, unhesitatingly, “No!” “If you violate law, you must,” they say, “bear the consequences. The penalty will be exacted from you personally down to the uttermost farthing. Nothing can break the entail. As you have sown, so you must reap.”

Now here, brethren, is pretty gospel for humanity! I have done wrong. I have sinned. And my sin must go

on multiplying, and spreading, and intensifying itself ; and exacting its penalties to all eternity, so far as I can see ! What a prospect ! I have got on an inclined plane, and nothing whatever can avail to stop my descent ; but I must go down, with an ever-accelerating pace, into an abyss of wretchedness and woe ! Now I do believe, that if I break a law of God, I must take the consequences—the full consequences—*unless some other law intervenes to rescue me*. But I believe also, that there is such another law—a law by which I may be rescued, if I choose to avail myself of it. And this belief of mine is participated in by the great majority of the human race. The instinct in us, brethren, leads us, as I have said, when we have sinned, to look out for some means of obliterating the sin, or, in other words, of atoning for it. And the same instinct tells us, that such a means of making amends, of making atonement, may somewhere be found.

But *where* ? There are three answers to the question—two wrong answers, one right. The first answer is this—“I may make amends by my own personal suffering.” And you find that in all ages men have endeavoured in this way to relieve themselves from the torment of sin. They have submitted to most horrifying and most protracted penances ; they have macerated their bodies ; they have accumulated sacrifice upon sacrifice ; they have lavished gifts of the costliest kind—“burnt-offerings, thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil ; even their first-born for their transgression, the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul ;” but no peace of mind has been gained. And when the agony produced by the sense of having done wrong has been exceptionally acute,

they have flung their lives away, thinking that, at any rate, *that* sacrifice must avail to wipe off the reckoning against them. But all has been useless; and when man comes to understand things rightly, he sees, that to cancel sin—even one sin—is a work as completely beyond and above his own power to accomplish, as it would be to make the sun go back in his course, or to create a world. This is the first answer. The second is like unto it. We are told that the mercy of God forgives sin, without demanding any sacrifice. But, if we accept this view, we must be contented to trample on the universal instinct of the human heart, which has always regarded some compensation for sin as being imperatively called for. Again, if we accept this view, we must put aside the Scriptures, or, at least, empty them of their meaning. Is it possible, brethren, honestly, to regard the Jewish system as being anything else than sacrificial? Why, the very pages of the Pentateuch, or, at least, of some parts of it, reek (if I may so say) with sacrificial blood; and would that be without a grim and absolute necessity for the thing? What is the meaning of the altar? and the victim? and the confessing of sins over the head of the victim? and the laying on of the hands of the offerer? and the sprinkling of blood? and the statement, that it is “the blood that maketh atonement for the soul?” What is the meaning of all this, if God has only to demand the repentance of the sinner? if in the work of forgiveness, there is no act of sacrifice and atonement, but only an act of mercy?

We put these two answers then aside, and we come to the third—the true one. What the human race has in vain looked for in its own efforts—the atonement of sin—that has been made upon the Cross of Calvary, by the Lamb of

God that taketh away the sin of the world. How the death of Christ atones for sin is more than we can understand. We can only get a glimmer of the meaning. But that it does atone, is revealed to us, and revealed distinctly enough. All sin, upon repentance, is made as though it had never been. By the virtue of this sacrifice, it is cancelled, it is done away with. "Christ hath put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." And now, to all who believe in Christ, is the promise addressed—"Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

II.—I began by saying that *sin is a mystery*. If that statement commended itself to you, you will not be unwilling to believe that there is something mysterious in the matter of dealing with sin; that it was needful that *God* should interfere; and that the manner of His interference should be such as should altogether pass our comprehension. Considerations like these will help you, I think, to meet the difficulties which are sometimes suggested. Such, for instance, as this. "You have just asserted"—says some one—"that you cannot make amends for your sin, by your own personal suffering. But yet you go on to tell us, that men are saved by availing themselves of the suffering of another. Is there not something mean? unworthy? even immoral—about this?" Brethren, may I ask you to notice, that in this objection (it is a very common one) the fallacy lies in the representing the relation between Christ and His people, as if it were nothing more than a relation between man and man. If Christ were only an individual member of the human race, I should be as ready as any one to allow, that in the com-

mon orthodox view there is something that I could not believe. A man may do much for me. He may pay my debts, and set me free from liability. He may interpose himself between me and a coming blow, and thus save my life at the expense of his own. Or, to descend to more ordinary things, he may pledge his own good name for my better behaviour in the future, when I have committed myself by committing some offence, and thus he may run a great and serious risk, in the hope of reinstating me in the estimation which I have forfeited. But there is a point, beyond which he cannot go. Suppose I have broken the law, and am brought up before a judge for trial and sentence—he cannot take my guiltiness upon himself, and suffer the penalty of law in my place. He stands then in his individuality; I in mine. Did I then hold what are called “Unitarian” views, and believe Christ to be merely a man; one out of many, though a model man, “a Son of man,” the choicest and best specimen of the human race, the flower of humanity, a great prophet and ruler sent from God, but still a mere individual human being—I think I should be consistent enough to reject the ordinary doctrine of the atonement. But I believe nothing of the kind! I hold the person of Christ to be something altogether peculiar and exceptional. He is the Word of God, Who became flesh. He is man, and not *a* man; and as such, He is the head and root of the entire human race—in such a way that, what He has done and suffered may be transferred to us, really and not fictitiously; and whilst He becomes “sin for us,” we may “become the righteousness of God in Him.” “*Mystery!*” you say. Yes! mystery; but God’s truth, nevertheless. “*Mystery!*” Yes! but the

whole subject of sin, and of God's dealing with sin—is and must be a mystery.

Another thought occurs to me, which it may perhaps be well to bear in mind. You remember the story of human sacrifices—say, that of Iphigenia in Aulis, as a type of all others. Some of you, who are readers of our great poet Tennyson, will have before your mind's eye the picture he draws of the poor girl, in the first flush of her youth and beauty, dragged unwillingly to the slaughter, and shuddering as the edge of the sharp, cruel knife of the sacrificing priest touches her tender throat. You will see, as he paints them, the stern, black-bearded, wolfish kings, who glare on the sacrifice, grimly contented to see the victim die, because they think that their own interest, the success of their enterprise, demands her death. And you will feel how unutterably degraded and base was the state of mind into which these selfish and cowardly villains had permitted themselves to fall. Matters would have been mended, of course, if Iphigenia had come voluntarily forward as a victim. And yet not much mended after all. What should we think of men, who, for the sake of saving themselves would quietly, deliberately, spontaneously, without being in any way compelled—accept the offer of the self-sacrifice of another? Why, we should hold them in the profoundest contempt. But with regard to the self-sacrifice of Christ—I pray you, brethren, to keep your minds clear of misapprehension. That Christ was a willing victim, is clear enough. “No man taketh My life from Me; but I lay it down of Myself.” He *could* have come down from the cross, if He would. But, granting His willingness to die, you and I are not in a position to avail ourselves of it, as the Greek kings

would have been, if Iphigenia had volunteered herself in sacrifice. Christ does not stand on one side, and we on another, and we deliberately resolve to get ourselves out of trouble by putting Him into it at His own request. The case stands rather thus. We have ourselves, in our passion and self-will, struck Him down, because He stood in our way. We knew not what we did at the time. We murdered Him, in short, and then, when our eyes were opened, we found that we had really been the unconscious instruments of accomplishing a sacrifice, of which we were compelled—compelled by our feelings of compunction and gratitude—to avail ourselves. We have much then to accuse ourselves of, brethren, very much; but not of the miserable selfishness of deliberately choosing to save ourselves, at the expense of the sacrifice of the life of another.

III.—So much, then, for some of the difficulties which we have to grapple with. I have been giving you rather isolated thoughts, than a connected discourse; and with two more isolated thoughts, which I think of some considerable importance, I will conclude my address.

First, this. What we want—in a scheme of salvation—is something which shall inspire men with the greatest horror of sin, and make them watchful against it; and at the same time, set them free from that power, which the fact of having sinned exercises over us. To manage the two things separately is easy enough. Tell men that God is an easy-going Being, who requires no sacrifice, no atonement; who forgives sin on the mere expression of repentance on the part of the sinner; and if you can persuade them to believe you, you have reduced sin to a comparative trifle, and made them easy about it. Or, on the other hand, place before

men the terrors of the Law ; show how the divine wrath is displayed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men ; speak of the worm that never dieth, and the fire that is never to be quenched—and you will give them a sort of horror of sin ; but, in all probability, drive them to despair and to recklessness of living. But how shall the two purposes be combined, so that men, whilst feeling sin to be forgiven—feeling it to be a vanquished foe—feeling that though it may distress them, it shall have no power to destroy them—shall yet be kept constantly on their guard against it ; aiming at victory, aiming at holiness, aiming at purity, aiming at a growing likeness to the Lord Jesus Christ ? How shall this combination be accomplished ? Only by the Cross of Jesus Christ. If Christ be the incarnate Son of God—you can have no such setting-forth of the horror of sin as the Cross affords. If Christ be the incarnate Son of God, and His death a sacrifice—you can have no such evidence, that sin is a vanquished foe ; you can have nothing, which will so set the heart at liberty to yield a cheerful filial obedience to the divine commands.

My last thought is this—that in the Cross of Jesus Christ you have the most astounding exhibition of the love of God that can possibly be conceived.

Do you and I, brethren, after all, really understand the meaning of the sacrifice of the incarnate Son ? “God spared not His own Son,” says the Apostle. What is it, then ? I almost fear to utter the words, but they seem to me to be true. *The Cross exhibits God laying the sin of the world on His own heart, and dealing with it. The Cross exhibits God punishing Himself for the sin of mankind.* “Mystery again,” you say. Yes ! mystery—the mystery of divine love. And if this “mystery of divine love” does not touch and win your hearts, believe me, brethren, you are spiritually hopeless—and I do not know what can be done to save you.

XI.

THE BOOK ECCLESIASTES.

“For God shall bring every work into judgment—with every secret thing—whether it be good or whether it be evil.”—ECCLES. xii. 14.

THE Book to which these words belong is a very singular one. Unbelievers have resorted to it as to a storehouse, in which they might find weapons for the overthrow of the Christian faith; whilst not a few persons who regard it as a portion of the Word of God, and look upon it with respect, have yet felt themselves compelled to resort to the most violent and unnatural methods of interpretation for the purpose of bringing its statements—or, at least, some of them—into harmony with the general teachings of the sacred volume. It would seem, however, as if there were no very great reason for either the expectations of the one party, or for the apprehensions of the other. God teaches us, of course, by plain and straightforward statements; or by precepts the meaning of which is obvious at once. Of such teaching we have instances in the Ten Commandments; in the various enactments of the Mosaic Law; and, coming down to later times, in the discourse which our Lord delivered on the mount. But God has also other methods of instruction at His command, and amongst them is—the leading us to contemplate

the human soul earnestly engaged in the solution of some of the more painful problems of our human life. You will understand better what I mean if you think of the Book of Job. There there are verses, sentences, whole paragraphs—which if taken by themselves, are so one-sided and untrue, that you could not speak of them as the utterances of the Spirit of God; but you have also the frank expression of feeling, and the honest groping towards the light (at least, on the part of the patriarch himself) which issues, at last, in a happy result. You will not, then, rightly understand that Book of Job if you deal with it piece-meal—bit by bit—assuming that each bit is inspired, and as such, might be made the text of a sermon. You must endeavour to master the fluctuations and progressions of thought; and to ascertain how the end is arrived at. Only by so doing can you hope to gather the lesson which the Divine Spirit would teach you.

And it is just so, I think, with the treatise with which we are concerned this morning. What is wanted for the understanding of the difficult Book Ecclesiastes is the broad and general survey—the grasping of the central idea—and not the discussion of isolated verses, in the belief that each of them, because it is found in the pages of Holy Writ, is equally true and equally inspired.

But let me come a little closer to my subject. We assume that the Book—the bulk of it—is really the composition of King Solomon, to whose authorship it is attributed in the opening verse. But we venture to think it probable that the Book, as we have it now, was issued by some subsequent editor—himself an inspired man—who added, besides the single verse of introduction, the six verses at

the end, before the Book itself was placed in the sacred canon. If so, brethren, we are simply introduced, in the twelve chapters, to the workings of the author's mind, as he contemplates the complicated phenomena of our human existence. The verdict, which he pronounces, is—that "All is vanity!" He begins with striking that note. He ends in the same way. But what does he mean? Just this. Recognising, throughout, that God rules the world—he is yet sorely puzzled to discover how different things are from what—on the supposition of the divine rule—he should have expected them to be. There seems to be little or no retribution anywhere. God is a Judge, no doubt. But where is His judgment? The wicked prosper; the unscrupulous and violent force their way to the front; and the godly get no reward for their godliness—if indeed they do not suffer for it. You sow good deeds, and you reap ingratitude. You try to be useful, and you are met with perpetual disappointment and failure. There are, no doubt, some gleams of happiness—but they are few and far between, and they are soon overclouded. Nothing continues—nothing is permanent. "Change and decay in all around we see." And then, how poor and meagre and monotonous and unsatisfying—how devoid of all great result—is this life of ours! a little round of petty occupations and insignificant duties, with nothing of grandeur or nobleness about them; a waking and sleeping—an eating and drinking; a marrying and giving in marriage: in fact, a strutting out our puny hour upon the stage—with quarrellings and disputes; with loves and affections; with feverish strugglings for precedence; with eager clutchings at some portion of this world's good—and then, the curtain dropping over the scene and

consigning all alike—without consideration of character—to one common fate: to a cold and dark oblivion. Th is the condition of man—a condition created and presided over by an All-wise and Almighty God! Oh! what a puzzling, perplexing thing our human existence is!

Now, do you say, brethren, that this is extraordinary language for a “sacred writer,”—as we call him—a man inspired by the Spirit of God—to employ? Well, perhaps it is. And perhaps Solomon, when he wrote “Ecclesiastes,” was not in the most spiritual possible frame of mind. His experience, as we know, was a singular one. But for all that, we may be sure that he is depicting to us the mental struggle through which some of the more thoughtful minds of his time were passing, and that he is doing it with perfect accuracy. It would be a mistake to regard the book as the mere product of the cynicism of a royal voluptuary worn out with sensual excess before his time, and naturally inclined to contemplate the world from the darkest point of view. It may be that partly, though I doubt it. It is certainly more than that. It is rather (as I have just said) a reflection of the difficulties besetting the religious men of those days, when they endeavoured to reconcile their belief in God with the way in which they saw the world ordered and governed round them. To you and me, brethren, the problem is not so very perplexing—simply because we live in the time of a clearer revelation. The Jew of Solomon’s days knew little about the future state. For wise reasons, God had seen fit to restrict his view within the horizon of the present. Some light he had, of course; but it was the light of hint and intimation—rather than that of clear and certain knowledge. With us it is the full and certain

persuasion that a day is coming when everything shall be brought to judgment, and the inequalities of time be redressed in eternity—it is this which enables us to look calmly on a state of things which, perhaps, is quite as puzzling now as it was in the time of the “Preacher, son of David, King in Jerusalem.” We have our special problems, of course; but they are not the problems which troubled the mind, and exercised the faith, of the ancient believer.

But let us proceed. We come to the 11th chapter of the Book—that which forms part of the first lesson for the day. Here, the writer seems to have got out of his melancholy, and he strikes a more cheerful strain. It is true, he tells us, that there is an uncertainty attending all human effort. No one can make sure of results; but ought we not to see in that very circumstance an incentive to varied and persevering effort? If one enterprise fails, another may succeed. It probably will. And so, on the average, something like success may be achieved. “Cast thy bread on the waters”—(the allusion being, as is supposed, to the scattering of rice-corn on the inundated fields of Egypt just before the river begins to fall)—“and thou shalt find it after many days.” It is true that your beneficence will oftentimes meet with ingratitude; and that, in some cases, you may devoutly wish you had held your hand; but for all that, multiply your acts of kindness, do good on as large a scale as possible, and the more so, as you know not how soon the opportunity of benefiting your fellow-men may be withdrawn from you: “Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be on the earth.” Again, be hopeful in your work; be energetic; be diligent; you cannot guard against all possibilities of failure. It is idle

to attempt to do so. And to demand the certainty of success before you begin to act—is to condemn yourself to perpetual inaction. But, having taken your measures wisely, go right on : not suffering yourself to be deterred by the threatenings of opposition ; not allowing your mind to dwell on the prospect of disappointment ; not glancing aside at any gathering darkness. Go firmly and resolutely forward. For he that is for ever watching the wind will not sow ; and he that stands staring up at the clouds will certainly not reap, and bring his harvest in. And again (he says)—it is true that human happiness is unstable, and that the brightness of life soon passes away, and the dark days, which are many, rapidly come upon us. But for all that—it is reasonable, it is right to rejoice in the good gifts of God, which are so richly bestowed upon us—“truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun”—but it is well for us to remember all the while, that our joy ought to be temperate and chastened joy—and not the joy of abandonment to pleasure ; and that we look forward to the account which is to be given at the close.

But, after this temporary change of tone, the writer seems to lapse into his former dismal mood. Perhaps he was growing old himself, and beginning to feel the failure of those magnificent faculties with which the Creator had endowed him ; or, perhaps—with his keen powers of observation—he had watched the effect of advancing years upon others. Anyhow, the sad vision of the close of human life rises up before him, and he paints it to us as no poet has ever painted it before, or will ever paint it after him. You remember it, of course. Some have treated the wonderful

passage anatomically: "This refers (they have said) to the teeth; in that expression the writer means the hair. Here we have the dimness of sight of old age; there the trembling limbs: and here again, the failing health." But, to do this, brethren, leads to overstrained and ridiculous interpretations. Better is it just to take the general effect, without attempting too minute an investigation of details. And the general effect is grand! Before us is a magnificent and stately mansion—fair to look at; once busy and bustling with active life—but now afflicted and affrighted, as if under the influence of some great calamity. The porters who keep the doors are in consternation and trembling: the grinding-women pause in their labours below, or carry them on with difficulty—because they are few; the owner of the mansion sits uneasy and distressed and desolate in his chamber; the ladies of the household no longer look out of the lattice. All is dark and dreary inside. And the gate—which once gave welcome to troops of guests and friends—is closed. There is no communication with the outside world—the interests of life have ceased. Then the scene shifts, and we have the easily-broken slumbers of the old man—the chirping of a bird disturbs him—and his easily-aroused alarms. He is afraid of that which is high. He sees difficulty and danger where nobody else suspects them. Another stroke of the pencil puts before us the departure of his former enjoyments. He cannot hear the music, which once thrilled through him; nor behold the fair scenes, over which his eye once expatiated with such intense delight. He has no relish for his food. Nothing can stimulate his jaded appetite and his worn-out senses—and the end is clearly at

hand. Again, the scene shifts, and the end has come! Now the dark procession passes through the streets—the hearse, the mourners, the little crowd—and the man is being carried to his long home. Nay; *not the man himself!* but the broken and ruined machinery that was constructed with such exquisite skill by the great Artificer, and has at last finished its work, and must be cast aside. The wheel that has revolved so often stands still. It can move no more. The ties which linked the man to life—to home—to kindred—to friends—are snapped. The golden bowl of thought and affection and aspiration and desire is shattered, and its precious contents are spilt and lost. All is over! Yes! in such sadness and loss, in such feebleness and pain, in such humiliation and degradation of decay, in such deep gloom, sets the life which God has given—the life of man upon earth. And the clouds of melancholy, which seemed for the moment almost to have dispersed, gather once more round the mind of the sacred writer, and he ends, as he began, with the mournful exclamation—“Vanity of vanities! saith the preacher, All is vanity!” If this is all—is life worth the living?

It is at this point (as we think) that the second writer—the editor of the treatise—who was to Ecclesiastes what the writer of the last chapter of Deuteronomy was to the Pentateuch—comes in. Perhaps a more spiritual man than Solomon—though not so vast in intellect—he supplies the requisite answer to the mournful questions. No! life would not be worth the living, and life would be an unutterable puzzle and perplexity, an insoluble problem, were there not another life to come—a life beyond the grave, and a judgment to follow. In these two facts you have the

solution of your difficulty. This life is redeemed from its insignificance, its paltriness, its worthlessness, its sadness—by its connection with another, to which it is the appointed entrance. The seed which we sow now may seem poor and homely, not much to look at ; but we have to consider the plant that in the future will spring out of the seed. And as to the other part of the problem, that which connects itself with the apparent inequalities of the divine dealing with the children of men—that too is met by the conviction “that God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.”

I will employ the few moments that remain by endeavouring to make the subject practically useful to ourselves. Believers of old (look at the 37th Psalm) were sorely puzzled and distressed by the sight of the prosperity of the ungodly. “How is it to be reconciled”—they asked—“with the fact that there is a righteous God’ ruling over men?” Why were they puzzled? Because, owing to the necessary gradualness of revelation, they had so little light thrown upon the future. You do not find the early Christians complaining of the difficulty ; and yet it encountered them in the severest form. They—the people of God—harmless and kindly, full of love to God and man, were oppressed and crushed and ground to powder by wicked men seated in high places of the earth. But they were in no trouble about it—I mean mental trouble. The thing was intelligible enough. Why? Because there was, they knew, a day of retribution coming—when God would avenge His own cause. And the affliction, which was but for a moment, would certainly work for them an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. In other words—the painful problem of

one age was solved by the greater light from above vouchsafed to another. Where, then, did the devout and thoughtful men of earlier times find refuge from the religious doubts and difficulties that beset and harassed them? Not in distinct revelation on these points—for they had it not—but in a general persuasion of the love and wisdom and power and righteousness of God. Somehow or other—they felt—they could not see how—the Judge of all the earth would be sure to do right.

Well, brethren, and we too have a somewhat similar position. Some things, for us, have been cleared up; others lie still in shadow. There still remain round us much of what the poet calls “the painful riddle of this earth;” much that we cannot understand; much that is deeply perplexing (if we think at all, and are not wholly engrossed with our own petty affairs); much that we find it hard to reconcile with strong belief in the wisdom and love of that God Who has manifested Himself to us in Jesus Christ. We, too, have our own intellectual difficulties—as every age has them—and we must sometimes decide to hold fast to certain great truths of faith, notwithstanding objections which we know not how to remove. In such cases the Book of Ecclesiastes will come in to our help. We must learn from it to trust God in the dark. Having no distinct light falling from heaven upon these problems—we must take counsel with the heart, rather than with the head: and believe that the words of the Lord will be fulfilled to us—“What I do, thou knowest not now—but thou shalt know hereafter,”—and hold fast the conviction—that, in spite of all appearances to the contrary—the day that is coming will be the day of revelation of the *righteous* judgment of God.

XII.

LIFE A VAPOUR.

“Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.”—JAMES iv. 14.

THE Apostle is censuring, what was a very common habit in his time, and I suppose, is no less common in ours—that, of forgetting to regard God’s will as a factor in the affairs of our every-day life. Men, he says, lay their plans, as if they were sure of enjoying a practical immunity from death. They settle what they will do this day, and the next day, and the day after, and, indeed, for a whole year; they will go to such a place, and then to such another; and buy and sell and get gain, and perhaps make a fortune—quite forgetting all the while that they cannot tell what the morrow may bring forth; quite forgetting that to-morrow they may be numbered with the dead, and that their plans and purposes may have come to nought. Now, there is obviously no objection to our making plans for the future. In fact, we are obliged to do so. You must look forward and provide, and so must I; and the business of the world would soon come to a standstill, if forecasting and arranging for conceivable contingencies were forbidden by our Christian duty. But,

it is the spirit in which we forecast and provide, that makes the difference. If we recognise the divine interposition in our affairs, and are willing to leave our arrangements, all decisions, all results, all consequences in God's hands—of course, after doing our best—it is well. It is not well, if we take for granted, that we shall unquestionably be able to bring our designs to a successful issue; nay, it is not only “not well,” it is a folly and a sin, such as no Christian man ought to allow himself to commit.

And yet, brethren, I fear we are often guilty of it, perhaps, almost without any consciousness of the offence. Let us see.

There is no subject on which there would be found such an universal assent and agreement, as the subject of the uncertainty of the individual life—I say “individual” life, because the average duration of human life may be calculated with something approaching to certainty—and we feel, all of us, how absolutely true, as well as how poetically beautiful, is the imagery of the Apostle in the text. You look up into the sky—say, on some fine, calm summer's afternoon in the country, when all nature seems at peace; when a gentle breeze is whispering its quiet messages to the woods, and bending the heads of the flowers; and when no other sound is heard save that of the distant lowing of cattle in their meadows, or the bleating of sheep in their folds, or the chirping of the birds on the boughs; and your attention is fixed on one particular cloud, which hangs, a great mass, poised in the air, just within the range of your vision. As you gaze, the cloud is sometimes darkened with a passing shadow, or again lighted up with beauty by the beams of the sun. But it perpetually

shifts and changes its shape. It undergoes strange modifications. And it seems to become smaller, thinner, more transparent ; its bulk diminishes ; it is obviously smouldering and melting away. Then the setting sun shoots his level rays across the landscape, and the cloud which you have been watching, reduced to the smallest possible dimensions, gleams, perhaps for a passing moment—an islet of rosy or golden radiance, a tiny flash of glory—and when you look again, it has altogether gone. Yes ! We are, each of us—our life is—like “a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.”

And I think I may say, that the same law of perpetual transmutation holds good with regard to our congregations also. We seem, for instance in this congregation, to change in about seven or eight years. Of those who cast in their lot with us at the outset of my ministry in this place, who occupied the first pews of the old Iron Church, very few now remain—a mere handful—and these few, from one cause or another, are rapidly diminishing and dwindling away. Fresh members come to take the vacant places. The waves roll on like the waves of the sea, though the particles are not the same. The cause of Christ advances, I trust, amongst us ; for God they say, “buries His workers, and carries on His work.” But I am reminded, as I look upon you, of the strange flux that is ever taking place in our human affairs. And if we look forward—it cannot be so very many years before a still greater change will arrive. Then, another voice will be heard from this pulpit ; other faces than those gathered round me now will be looking up at the preacher. The youngest amongst us will have passed away into the

eternal world behind the veil. And though I trust, that even then, with such allowable modifications as time always brings in, the old truth will be preached, and the old spirit of brotherliness will survive, ay! and that the congregation may be even more potent for good than it is now—yet, you and I will have melted away like a cloud, and nothing will be left of us beyond the bare memory of our names, if even that survives.

Well, brethren, we believe in the uncertainty of life, and we sentimentalise about it—as I have just been doing—but does that uncertainty produce any very real and practical effect upon us? It may be doubted. We manage, I think, to parry the personal inference. We claim in our secret hearts exemption from the general liability. Is not what I say true? Look at the matter in this way. We hear, let us say, of the death of one of our own contemporaries. Perhaps he was a boy at school with us, or a student in the same university; or perhaps, he was apprenticed to the same master; or took his place in the bank, or in the counting-house, at the same time that we did; or he entered upon business for himself in the same month with us. We have run together, it may be with different fortunes, but still, side by side, for many years. We have not, it is true, met him often of late; but we have heard of him occasionally—and heard that he was prospering, or the reverse—and now the news comes of his death. Naturally, we might be expected to say to ourselves—“This is a hint, at least, if not a warning. It may be my turn next.” But, instead of this, brethren, we begin to think—do we not?—of the circumstances which seem to put a difference between his case and ours. “He was always of

a delicate constitution ; I only wonder he lived so long ;” or, “his parents died early and mine lived till beyond eighty ;” or, “he was not quite so careful of himself as he might have been ; I am told he was overfond of good eating and drinking ;” or, “he could never be induced to take life easy—he always worked too hard, and was too anxious.” In some way or other, we continue to turn aside the plain hint that we received, as to the rapid advance of time, and the absolute uncertainty of life ; and we satisfy ourselves that there is no reason whatever for supposing that we may not continue in health and strength, and fair average prosperity for many, many years to come.

Now, this difficulty of realising, or, as I should rather say, this determination *not* to realise in our own case a fact which we plainly see, to be applicable to the case of everybody else—leads sometimes to disastrous consequences.

I.—First, as to those who are careless and indifferent about religion. Did a man believe that his life was like a vapour, and that, however young, or vigorous he might be, an unexpected illness, brought on, say, by a draught of poisoned water, or by fortuitous contact with disease, or by a fall from a horse, or by a railway collision, or an accident in the crowded streets—might suddenly sever his thread of existence, and hurry him into the presence of the dread Being, whose commands he had disobeyed, and whose authority he had defied?—did he really believe this—I think it would be impossible, or almost impossible, for him to postpone to a more convenient season the all-important task of making his peace with God. But the fact is, that *he feels sure that he*

shall live, and so he trifles with the opportunity as it rapidly glides away. That the great majority of unconverted men intend, as they would tell you, to repent some day—I am perfectly persuaded. There may be some, who are hardened by long-continuance in rebellion, and who have no feeling at all on this subject, and have neither hopes nor fears. But if there are such people, they are very few in number. The rule is, that unconverted men look forward to change before it is too late; and what keeps them unconverted, what keeps them thinking, and intending, and planning, and purposing, but never taking a decided step in the right direction—is the secret, but unavowed conviction, that they are sure to live longer, that their life is not what the Apostle says it is—“a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” And may we not say that the same cause operates prejudicially, though not so fatally, in the case of the true and sincere people of God? Even with them there is sometimes a miscalculation on this subject, which leads to slackness in the conduct of life.

I would put it in this way, Christian brethren. If you and I were told, on authority which we could not possibly question, that Christ would come again in a few hours—come again this very night, or to-morrow, to receive His people to Himself—would there not be regrets amongst us as to the discharge of our duty, and the employment of the talents that have been committed to us? We may feel that the Saviour would own us, and that we should not be cast out; and yet, would not the feeling with many of us be, that we should be thankful for an extension of time, so that we might set our house in order, and be better prepared to face the Master when He comes to reckon with His ser-

vants? And I suppose the cause of this is, that we are confident about living longer; that our secret impression is, that Scriptural statements about the uncertainty of life, though applicable in their full force to others, are not, in deed and truth, applicable to us. But here let me make myself understood. It is not the belief that we shall probably continue to live, that is to be found fault with; *but the tacit assumption that we shall certainly continue to live.* It is on this tacit assumption that all recklessness, and procrastination, and slack and careless living are based. The chances are, of course, that in all cases existence will be prolonged—here for a longer, there for a shorter period. And on these chances we are perfectly entitled to reckon. In fact, to put the matter in the fewest possible words—"You and I, brethren, should expect to live, and we are fully justified in expecting it; but yet, we should be careful to live in such a way, as always to be ready to die."

II.—Our subject would be incomplete, I think if I did not add to what has been already advanced, another thought. The imagery of the Apostle, at first sight, conveys the impression that human life, being an evanescent, may be regarded as an insignificant and inconsiderable thing. But this is not what he really means. A thing may be evanescent, and yet leave enduring and important traces behind. It is so with our life. If you compare a man with humanity, the little unit with the vast myriads of mankind—how exceedingly insignificant each one of us is! Nor are we much more important from another point of view. We often speak of the great work which such and such a person is doing. We ask anxiously how the various enterprises in

which he was engaged, and which seemed to depend for their success on his sagacity and perseverance—can be kept from falling to the ground, when he is taken away from amongst us ; and sometimes we are almost inclined to despair of the future. But the man is removed. He passes from his busy labours into the rest and calm of the eternal world, and—somehow or other this world manages to go on without him. Others catch the torch which was dropped from his hand, and hold it aloft, and carry it on. The work goes forward, and though a few faithful hearts may miss him and mourn for him, and speak tenderly and lovingly of his many virtues, and think nobody like him—the vast tide of human life sweeps forward, unheeding of its loss ; and we learn once more the old lesson, that “no man is necessary.” Ay, and we may thank God, brethren, that no man is necessary ; that the place is soon filled ; that the message is carried on by other messengers ; that the labour is brought to completion by other hands ; that in spite of the feebleness and transitoriness of the workers, the kingdom of truth and righteousness and peace, in some shape or other, with manifold checks and recoils—through failures, through disappointments, as well as through successes—is being established on the face of the earth.

But yet—and this is the thought I wish to impress upon you—insignificant as you and I are from many points of view, it is hardly possible to overestimate, from other points of view, the importance of the life which we are now leading here below. For in the first place—we influence, by our conduct and example, the destiny of others ; possibly, their eternal destiny. And then as to ourselves—transient

as our lives, and transient as our actions are, they leave their permanent traces behind them. *The thing which endures, is character.* The thing which is eternal, is character. And this character we are continually building up, more and more as time goes on. "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

III.—The subject which we have thus discussed together, suggests one or two more thoughts, which I will just touch upon, and then conclude.

In the unseen world, to which we are all of us hastening, there are two vast companies, with a deep line of demarcation—an impassable gulf—between them; two companies composed—the one, of those who have loved and served God in this life; the other, of those who have loved and served Him not. A veil hangs between us and them. It may drop at any moment. It must drop before long. When it drops—which company shall we join? Brethren, let us look the question fairly in the face. Which?—*which?* supposing the summons to come now! "Well," says some one, "I really don't know. Certainly, I cannot say that I have lived for Christ. I have not. But as certainly, none can accuse me of unrighteous or profligate living. Is there no intermediate company to which I might attach myself when I go hence, and am no more seen?" "None!" But we need not pursue the questioning. Your answer is given. If you do not belong to Christ, you move off to the left hand of the Judge. "What?" exclaims the man, "do you mean to tell me that I—a man of reputable character—am to be herded with murderers and poisoners, with thieves and

robbers, with the unclean and profligate, with all the miserable, and degraded, and filthy beings—the dregs which each age and generation has left behind it? that I am to be associated with them in an unhallowed, and perhaps unending fellowship? Do you mean this?” Assuredly I do—is my reply—I do mean this, and nothing else than this! The one bond which binds these unhappy beings together is antagonism to Christ. That antagonism takes one form in one man, and another form in another. In one man the form is dishonesty, in another it is impurity, in a third drunkenness, in a fourth falsehood, in a fifth it is simply worldliness. It matters little. These things, though they differ in character and in appearance, are only manifestations—symptoms of the one disease. And if you have not in life loved, and served, and followed the Lord—I care not who you are, or what you are—I say, unhesitatingly, that you belong to the vast assemblage of opponents of Christ, and that if you remain unchanged, your lot will unquestionably be to be cast in association and fellowship with them.

But let us turn to the brighter side. We have had enough of the terrors, though I have felt it right, to glance at them.

Has it ever occurred to you, brethren, to speculate on what the future will be—the future of the child of God? You have watched by the bed-side, it may be, of one near and dear to you, whom God, you feel—and yet how unwilling you are to feel it—is taking to Himself. There has been the usual fluctuation—the hopes of to-day abandoned to-morrow; the gradual wasting of strength; then the flicker in the socket, which so often precedes dissolution;

and then the day, which can never fade away from your memory, when the pulse fluttered more, and grew feebler and feebler, and the voice became more and more inaudible, and the heart almost ceased to beat until the final struggle came on, quietly it may be, and the last breath was drawn ; and the eye lost its light, and the cold hand dropped from your grasp—and all was over. Ah ! brethren, what a difference that event of dissolution has made ! Yours, a moment or two ago ! But yours, no longer ! A moment or two ago, so near to you ; but now, distant by the spaces of an universe, by the breadths of an eternity. Only a moment ago, your companion, and your friend ; and now—standing in radiant glory before the throne of God !

Your imagination rouses itself, and tries to follow. You ask, What was the first sight that broke upon the vision of the departed spirit ? What sort of world has it been ushered into ? What associates ? what reception ? what scenes—am I to picture to myself ? Are there no answers to such questions as these, brethren ? Indeed, indeed, there are. It would be terrible, I think, to feel as the end approaches, that we are passing into an unknown country, and among untried companionships. But the life of a Christian has been a preparation for what is to follow. And when his eyes open upon that mysterious world beyond the grave, amongst other feelings that will crowd in upon his mind, this is sure to be one, *that at last he has reached his Home*. His spiritual experience has given him intimations of what the new condition will be. He has had anticipations and foretastes of it. He will find there the sort of companions whom he takes pleasure in mixing with here. And even


if everything else should be strange and startling—scenery, circumstances, associates, sights, and sounds—there will be at least One Person whom he knows, and knows well—One, whose voice he has heard in the Word, whose face he has often sought in prayer, whose loving arm he has learnt to lean upon in the perilous journey of life, whose example he has humbly endeavoured to follow. And He, the centre of all, the brightness and the glory of that celestial sphere—will recognise His servant; and stretching forth hands of loving welcome to him, will bid him enter in into the joy of His Lord. To which, brethren, may we all of us come, through God's mercy, for Christ our Saviour's sake! Amen!



XIII.

GRIEVING THE HOLY SPIRIT.

“And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God,—whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.”—EPHESIANS iv. 30.

OU will observe, if you glance at the passage with which our text is connected, that the Apostle has been warning the Ephesians against some of those sins into which religious people are not unlikely to fall. Amongst them are faults of temper—which are frequently thought venial and unimportant, although, when we remember how much the peace of families is affected by them, we can hardly regard them as such—faults of temper, I say—bitterness, wrath, anger, showing themselves in reproachful speeches, sneers, in irritating insinuations, unkind taunts, and things of that nature. But, perhaps the gravest and most searching of all the Apostle’s warnings in the passage, is that in which he distinctly prohibits “corrupt communications.” “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth.” The word “corrupt” does not mean what you probably take it to be—impure or unclean. It simply stands for our expression, “worthless.” St. Paul had in his mind, when he wrote, the salt which has lost its savour, which has parted with all its healing properties—and so become good for nothing. Possibly, too, he might have

been thinking of our Lord's denunciation of "idle words" and if so, there is, I feel, a peculiar and unusual solemnity about his utterances here. For, if ever you and I, brethren, speak without consideration—especially when we discuss our neighbour's business—if ever we speak from the lust of gossiping, without any regard to the consequences that may follow from what we say—if we speak—not unkindly, not slanderously—but simply at random—loosely, carelessly, thoughtlessly, with no recollection of our brotherhood with others in Christ before our minds—then we are assuredly guilty of this "corrupt," this worthless communication out of the mouth which the Apostle condemns; and we are uttering those "idle words," for every one of which, as our Lord assures us, we shall have to give account in the day of judgment.

Now, the Apostle meets this danger of religious people by warning, of course—but by warning grounded on the great fact that the Holy Spirit is dwelling in us and that He has sealed, and is sealing us, unto the Day of Redemption. The argument of the text is this—that, by indulging in the practices which are condemned, we are "grieving" the Holy Spirit; and the Apostle seems to anticipate that the recollection of this circumstance will have the very greatest influence in putting true disciples on their guard, and in deterring them from what is so lamentably inconsistent with a Christian profession. The thought of the good and gracious Spirit, and of His close and intimate relation to us, will call forth (St. Paul thinks) our gratitude, as well as evoke our sense of responsibility; and thus we shall be armed against any of the temptations of this kind which may happen to assail. You see then, brethren, the field

of instruction which our subject opens up. Let us enter on it trusting that we may find something in our survey which shall help, and strengthen, and encourage us in our endeavour to lead a Christian life.

I.—In the first place, then, we may remind ourselves of what the Holy Spirit is. He is a Person—not a thing; and it is important for us, brethren, to bear this distinction in mind. Our mental attitude towards an attribute, an emanation, an influence, or an abstraction of any kind, would be very different indeed from that which we instinctively assume towards the Third Person of the ever-blessed Trinity. You remember the story told by Eliphaz the Temanite, in one of the earlier chapters of the Book of Job? In the dark watches of the night—when all the world was wrapped in profound slumber round him—he saw, he says, a vision—dim and indistinct, it is true—shadowy, but still a vision, an appearance of a living Being, of a spirit from the unseen and mysterious world. Had the old man thought that what he beheld was merely a figure formed by some fortuitous combination of light and shadow, and that the noise which penetrated his ear was nothing more than the breathing of the night-wind, made articulate by his fancy—little effect would have been produced upon him; his bones would certainly not have shaken, nor would the hair of his head have stood up. It was *the personality* that troubled him. His commotion of mind arose from the thought that he was in the presence of a Being, whose power over him he had no means of measuring, and whose feelings and purpose towards him he was utterly unable to ascertain.

You will understand the illustration. There is nothing, of

course, frightful or appalling about the Holy Ghost. Quite the reverse. His tenderness is strongly emphasised in Scripture. You read of the wrath of God the Father; you read even of the wrath of the Lamb. But you never read of the wrath of the Spirit: and the imagery employed to describe Him and His influence on mankind is of the gentlest possible character. We have, for instance, the dew that descends silently from heaven, the rain that comes down upon the mown grass, the wind that rustles the leaves of the trees, or that sweeps away the clouds from the fair face of the sky; and if, as is once the case, the coming of this supernatural guest is symbolised by the fire and the tornado—the fire is that which gleams in harmless flame over the thoughtful brows of the first Christian disciples gathered together in the rough upper room; and the tornado is that which overthrows and destroys nothing, but only announces, by an overpowering sound, the presence of God, and bids the people assemble together to listen to His overtures of mercy. The Holy Ghost, then, is emphatically gentle and tender and kind. He excites no emotions of alarm—like the vision that appeared to Eliphaz the Temanite; and yet we feel that, if He is a Being capable of entering into personal relations with us, our belief of this capability will necessarily influence in a marked degree the sentiments which we entertain towards Him, and the trust which we are inclined to repose in His help. In other words, brethren, our religion will be of one character if we believe that the Holy Ghost is a “thing,” and it will be of another character if we believe that the Holy Ghost is a “Person.” The Holy Ghost, then, is a person. But He is more than this—He is a Divine person, invested with all the true and

inalienable attributes of the Godhead. And ~~again~~, He is that Person of the ever-blessed Trinity Who comes into [closest contact with us.] It is possible for us, brethren, to have the divine life—the life of God—communicated to us. In fact, our salvation depends upon the communication of that life ; without that life we are “dead in trespasses and sins ;” with that life we are heirs of immortality, continually rising in the scale of being, growing in spiritual knowledge, and in conformity to the image of the eternal Son ; like Him now, even with all our inconsistency and feebleness, gloriously and perfectly like Him hereafter, when the shadows of this world shall have passed away and given place to the brightness of the day of the “manifestation of the sons of God.” But the Holy Ghost is the agent in the communication of that life. He is a mystery. But so are we, mysteries. “We know little about Him,” you say. “True,” I reply, “but we also know little about ourselves.” Our bodily frames present problems which it is impossible for us to solve. How much more that inner part of us, which we call our “spirit.” And is it too much to credit that the Divine Spirit has modes of access to us—has a power of influencing us—which we cannot comprehend, but which we can feel and be conscious of, and of the reality of which we may be assured by the effects produced upon heart and life, upon character and conduct ?

II.—In the second place, we have to consider what the Holy Ghost does for the world at large, and particularly for the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Representing, then, the love of God, that God who yearns for the salvation of men, and Whose will is that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth—He presses upon the

ndifferent, the worldly, the unconverted, the gracious offers which the Lord Jesus Christ makes to the children of men. To take an example, drawn from the occupation in which we are now engaged. If at any time, in our carelessness, we have been startled and aroused for the moment by the preaching of the Word ; if the vision of the love of God in Christ has risen before us, and we have resolved within ourselves that we would put an end to our indecision and accept the Saviour, and turn to Him with purpose of heart—we may have attributed the transient emotion to the energy and eloquence and earnestness of the preacher. But, if so, we totally misunderstood the whole nature of the case. The effect was really produced by God the Holy Ghost. It was He that was pleading, that was touching our heart, and awakening our conscience, that was urging us to have mercy upon ourselves, and not to judge ourselves unworthy of eternal life ; it was He that was opening up a vista through which we could look into the glories of the kingdom, and see the blessedness of those who have joined themselves to the Lord in the everlasting covenant. The human instrumentality was employed, of course—but that instrumentality of itself was utterly inadequate to produce the effect. We were, for the moment, feeling the touch of the Spirit upon our souls, and experiencing the putting-forth of His gracious and almighty power. And it is this, brethren, I would ask you to notice—it is this which makes our present life so serious a matter to us all. What was the meaning of the sickness that alarmed us, because it seemed to bring us so near to eternity ? of the trouble that befell us—the loss of fortune it may be, or the destruction of our hopes ? of the sad bereavement which darkened our house-

holds, and left us crushed and maimed, only half ourselves? of many and many an experience, too numerous to mention? Now, what did it all mean? Why, that God Himself was dealing with us and speaking to us, and striving, through those means, to win our souls; and if we still remain unwon, unmoved, unchanged, unconverted, it is because—simply because—*we have been able to resist the pleadings of the Holy Spirit of God.*

Ah! brethren, how sad a thing—how perilous—and in many cases, how fatal—is this resisting the Holy Spirit of God. The man is like one who is asleep—all the while in deadly peril, yet dreaming of security. The danger is gathering round him step by step, stealthily. If he wake not, he perishes! We call loudly to him. For the moment he rouses himself! He looks round! He seems to understand the situation. And we, on our part, hope that all will be well. But no! he sinks again into his lethargy. Again we call. But it is harder to rouse him now than it was before. He is used to the voice. However, he does bestir himself a little, but soon we observe that he sinks again into slumber. And this goes on until at last nothing can rouse him—(he has so benumbed himself)—and the deadly enemy comes in like a flood, and sweeps him away!

But now let us turn to those who have yielded themselves to Christ—taking Him for their Saviour, surrendering their will to His will. What happens in their case? That the Spirit of God enters into the inmost being of the man, and dwells there. It is a cheering and an elevating thought, brethren. There is that in me—if I am a Christian indeed—(it is not a mere influence—but a living Divine Person)

which will be like a well of water, ever springing up in me into everlasting life. I have in this Person the inexhaustible supply of my spiritual necessities—whatever and however great they may be ; and I need not fear (if I only believe and if I only avail myself, as I may do, of this indwelling treasure) that temptation shall overcome me, or that sorrow shall utterly break me down, or that my inward peace shall be destroyed, or that I shall be wanting in any one of the duties of the Christian life to which I may happen to be called. More than this. The indwelling Spirit lifts me out of my commonness, and makes me a temple. “Profane” before—I am sacred now. I may respect myself—nay, I must respect myself ; for, insignificant as I may be, as far as this world is concerned, I am bound up with the purposes of God. I am part and parcel of the great plan which the Almighty Disposer of events has arranged for the glory of His holy name. But, although I am entitled to entertain these cheering and elevating ideas, and to rejoice on account of them—I must, I feel, rejoice with trembling. The high privilege brings with it grave responsibility. It is a serious matter to have God so near to us as the Christian has. And most careful should I be not to “grieve” this Holy Spirit of God by any inconsistency of speech, or temper, or self-indulgence, or by showing a hard and unforgiving spirit to those who have wronged or offended me. Especially do I think myself bound to watch over my thoughts. In the house of my soul is a dweller—pure, holy, divine—whose presence there is my highest honour. He is sensitive to all evil. Shall I offend Him by bringing Him into contact with anything impure ? No ! I will cleanse the thoughts of my heart ; I will be watchful

over the thoughts of my heart, lest I should at any time "grieve" Him.

What it is to "grieve the Spirit," *i.e.* (as it would seem), to disturb the calm blessedness of the Godhead—I do not know. But I am sure that the words have a meaning which I am to try to understand. And just as there was something corresponding to the pain and effort of self-sacrifice on the part of the Father, Who (like Abraham when he offered Isaac on Moriah) "spared not" His own Son, but delivered Him for us all, so there is something akin to grief—at least, which is best expressed to us by the word "grief"—about the feeling of the Spirit when the people in whose soul He dwells, think or speak or do what is repugnant to His holy nature. I am sometimes told that we can add nothing to God; that God sits high up in His calm blessedness—that He is a sort of epicurean deity—in nowise the happier for our love, and in nowise the less happy if we withhold our love from Him. I doubt it, brethren. I doubt it, because of some language of the Old Testament which I recollect—"The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty: He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing." I doubt it, because of the statement of the passage before us—that the Holy Ghost can be "grieved." Such language as this (and you know how much there is of it in Scripture) convinces me that our God is no unemotional, impassive Being—a mere administrator of laws which we have to obey, and which we disobey at our peril. He has a heart, this great and mighty God. His name is love; and His love means something. Like our love, I believe it craves a return. And so, although I clearly see the

difficulty of the subject and cannot undertake to explain it, I see also that for Christ's sake as well as for our own—for the sake of the feelings of Christ—if I may so venture to express myself—it ought to be our endeavour to lead lives of purity and holiness, and of a perfect and entire consecration to the Lord our God.

Our subject will be hardly complete without some little reference to the statement in our text—that we are “sealed by the Holy Ghost unto the Day of Redemption;” and I must be allowed a few concluding words on the point. The “Day of Redemption” is that glorious time when the children of God shall be completely delivered from the dominion of evil. That that time has not yet arrived, is clear enough. We on earth are not free from the influence of sin. The saints of God who have gone before—well, their bodies lie crumbling in the grave, and death, so far, has dominion over them. But when the day of Resurrection dawns this will be ended, and redemption will be complete: complete for us as individuals, for sin will be gone and glory will have come: complete for the Church, for there will be no mixture of a foreign element in it, as there is now, but it will be without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; complete for this groaning and travailing creation—for it will have been delivered from the bondage of corruption, and from the usurpation of the Prince of this world, into the glorious liberty of the children of God: complete for God Himself—for then He will have fully acquired the purchased possession—purchased by the precious blood-shedding of the Son of His love unto the praise of His glory.

For this consummation, brethren, we—always supposing,

of course, that we are true believers—are being prepared. And how? By this very indwelling Spirit Who has been the theme of our discourse this morning. He seals us. Possibly the reference is to the seal on a document, which gives validity to the contract—and God in this way marks the Christian as His own. Look at the inner work. How do you know that your sins are forgiven? By the whisper of the Spirit in your hearts. How do you know that you are the children of God, and heirs of eternal life? By the Spirit's testimony. "The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." Other things concur, of course—a holy life, a growing in grace, and so on. But this is the court of ultimate appeal. Perhaps the reference is also to the sealing on the forehead, often spoken of in Scripture. If so, you have here the outward work : the evidence of the life. With us Christians the light ought to shine—and to shine more and more—advancing to the perfect day. Men should take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus. We should be more and more living epistles of the Lord, "known and read of all men." And in all this the indwelling Spirit is the agent—preparing us, fitting us, sealing us unto the Day of Redemption.



XIV.

THE DEMONIAK OF GADARA.

“And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine.”—MARK v. 16.

YOU will all of you, I suppose, agree with me in thinking it a somewhat serious thing to represent any statement made by the Lord Jesus Christ as being possibly a mistake. There are certain points upon which it is indispensably necessary for us to have information that we can trust. And, if He who is the Word of God, the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world, He who calls Himself the truth, and whom the Scripture certainly represents as the final and exhaustive revelation of the unseen Jehovah, if He is liable to blunder and go wrong, it is difficult to say from what quarter that indispensable, trustworthy information is to come. Could we conceive of Jesus Christ as being mistaken upon any one point, there is nothing to prevent us from supposing that He might be mistaken upon another. He might mislead us—unintentionally, of course, but still mislead us—upon such subjects as His own person, and His own work; upon such subjects as the divine character, and the means by which a sinner may obtain pardon and find grace to enable him to lead a godly life. Under such circumstances, it is clear that

we should be launched, in the matter of Christian doctrine, on a sea of perplexing and most painful uncertainty.

And again, brethren, you will agree with me in thinking it a still more serious thing to speak of the Lord Jesus Christ as if He could lend Himself consciously, to any mode of deception ; as if, for instance, He could assume the truth of what He knew to be false, or endorse a popular fallacy, in the hope of making His teaching acceptable or intelligible to His hearers. Thus "to do evil that good might come," is an idea which we cannot possibly associate with the thought of the incarnate Son of God. To accept that idea would be, to part with all our confidence in Him who professes to have been sent for the purpose of delivering us from sin. We should not be able to avoid feeling that a Saviour who could act such a part as this would, undoubtedly, stand in need of a Saviour and a salvation Himself.

Taking with us, then, these two considerations (which amount to the assertion that every statement which can be traced to the lips of Christ must be accepted as literally true), we cannot permit ourselves to question the following facts : That there are two worlds—the visible, and the invisible ; in the latter of which are hosts of spiritual agents, antagonistic to the will and purpose of God—beings who have modes of access to us, of which perhaps we are little aware, and who, out of sheer malice, are purposed to overthrow our goings, and to bring us down to the level of their own ruined and desperate condition ; or, to put it in other words, we cannot doubt that there is a kingdom of light, and a kingdom of darkness, each with a personal Head ; that, on the side of the one head—Christ—ranged under His ban-

ner, are all those who contend for the cause of truth and righteousness on the earth ; whilst, on the other side, stand the dark hosts of Satan—a mighty confederation—banded together for the destruction of goodness. Furthermore, we cannot doubt that this great conflict—carried on almost from the date of man's creation—came to its culminating point at the time when Jesus took our nature upon Him, and tabernacled amongst us in human flesh : for that then the Prince of Darkness put forth his utmost malignity—taking possession, in some mysterious way, of the souls and bodies of men ; whilst, on the other hand, the Lord Jesus, by meeting his machinations, displayed, on the most remarkable platform, His character as the destroyer of the works of the devil. It is to one of these manifestations of the divine power of Christ that our attention has been called by the second lesson of this evening's service. We have in the lesson the healing of the Gadarene demoniac—described, as usual, picturesquely and graphically, by the Evangelist St. Mark. Let me endeavour to discuss with you the subject without either ignoring the difficulties of the narrative, or attempting to evade them.

I.—We are told that, after delivering His first great series of parables—on the slopes of the western side of the Sea of Galilee—the Saviour crossed over with His disciples to the opposite shore, possibly in quest of much-needed retirement and repose. But this expectation was speedily disappointed ; for He had no sooner stepped out upon the shore, then a strange figure of a man, clothed in a few coarse rags, was seen hastily approaching—with the obvious intention of throwing himself in the way of Christ, and, as it were, disputing His passage

into the interior of the country. On the man came—with wild gesticulations and furious outcries—until, just as he approached the person of Christ, he seemed to abandon his original intention. He flung himself down, in humble prostration before the Saviour's feet, and "besought Him to do him no harm: not to torment him"—"I adjure Thee by God, that Thou torment me not." Who was this poor creature? "A madman," you say. Well, a madman, if you like. But still, more than a madman—one, whose mental aberration was occasioned by the presence in him of apparently more than one unclean spirit. It is conceivable, brethren (though we have no right to assume it), that the man's previous life had laid him peculiarly open to this terrible visitation. But whether this were so or not, we cannot but infer, from the Saviour's treatment of the sufferer, that He felt it was no ordinary case of human disease that was before Him; that it was no mere lunatic He was dealing with; and that unusual remedies were called for.

I pray you, turn to the narrative again, and consider it. The poor sufferer has, you will remember, a sort of sad two-fold consciousness about him. There is, first, himself—his own feelings and will: but that self is mastered and overpowered by some mysterious influence which has got possession of him, and which is more than an influence, for it is a person. With this tyrannising, inward personal will, he finds himself sometimes sympathising; though, for the most part, he recoils from it with horror. He desires to be delivered from the oppression, and yet he dreads the deliverance. And so he comes into the presence of Christ with a strange mixture of feelings—attracted by the divine holiness of the Saviour—perhaps, dimly hoping to be saved

by Him from his misery ; whilst, at the same time, he shrinks from Him as from one who is able, and probably disposed, to inflict the punishment which the unhappy demoniac knows or thinks himself to have deserved. Here, again, some one says, "After all, this is nothing more than a case of common lunacy." But let us look further. Christ had begun by commanding the unclean spirit to come out (and just allow me to say, in passing, that it is hard to believe that Christ would have employed such language as this if He had known that the man was suffering from physical disease, and from nothing else). The command, however, does not seem to have been obeyed immediately. Christ, perhaps, had not seen fit to put forth all His power ; the shock of an immediate expulsion might have been too great for the patient ; and, for the sake of the man himself, the Saviour continues the colloquy before He completes the triumph over His foe. A simple question is asked : "What is thy name? Now, obviously, this is done for the purpose of bringing the sufferer back to self-recollection. At the present moment he has almost entirely lost the feeling of an independent, individual, personal existence. He has come to identify himself with those foul indwelling tormentors of his : he has merged himself in them. But there was a time when he did not lie thus at the mercy of infernal powers. Then, he was a man amongst man—known by a name, and knowing himself by a name—a member of a brotherhood, an inhabitant of a city—conscious of the dignity, and of the responsibility of human nature. And the thought of the past—of all that had been—and all that perhaps might be again—rose up before him, when he heard the Saviour's

question, "What is thy name?" It is the first step towards his perfect emancipation. The effect, however, is not perceived at once. The mind reverts rather to the present misery. And the demoniac wildly answers: "My name is Legion; for we are many." Ay, the well-known Roman legion—with its six thousand trained warriors—with its firm array and stern onward movement, which nothing could turn aside—was the very embodiment, to the man's mind, of the idea of resistless force; and no word in the language could better describe those furious impulses, which had swept down upon his soul and hurried him from home and family and friends, and driven him into the tombs; which, even when he had been seized in the grasp of strong and resolute men, and bound in fetters and chains, had nerved him to burst away from them, and had sent him off, screaming and howling, to be the pest and the curse and the terror of the neighbourhood in which he dwelt. He seemed to have a "legion" of evil spirits within him—not one, but thousands: and "legion," he said, should be his unhappy name.

Now, let us pause for a moment here. We are not to suppose that the man was possessed with six thousand devils or demons. Several of them there were—that is clear; and we need not (knowing so little as we do about the mystery of spirit) make a difficulty about the fact that there were more than one. Christ Himself, as you will remember, speaks about seven devils entering into a man, after one had gone out. The language, then, is plainly that of hyperbole. The sufferer speaks according to his feelings; and the whirlwind of passion, which sometimes came down and hurried him away before it, seemed to him as if it proceeded from

a vast multitude of agents, rather than from a few. Let us regard, then, the answer of the demoniac as pointing to no definite number of tormentors, and only indicating that there were many of them. And let us take for granted (as I think we may), that, up to the present point at which we have arrived, the *tendency* of the colloquy between Jesus and the demoniac is to establish the fact of the existence of unclean spirits, and of their ability, at least, in our Lord's time, to take possession of the souls and bodies of men.

But when we we have advanced a step farther, the matter seems to be put altogether beyond dispute. The devils speaking, I suppose, through the vocal organs of their victim, entreat Jesus—in whom they recognise their judge—not to cast them out into the abyss, but to allow them to enter into a herd of swine, which is feeding on the brow of the mountain, at no very great distance. And Jesus gives them leave.

Now, is it conceivable that this should be the account of a mere cure of disease? of a simple removal of mental aberration? We have three narratives before us. All the Evangelists, except St. John, speak about the miracle; and all speak of *the demons as leaving their victim, and entering into the swine*. Say, if you will, that the narratives are false or erroneous. Then, we know where you are. But, supposing that you admit their truthfulness, it seems to follow, inevitably, that the demons must have had a real existence—for otherwise they could not have passed out of one body into another.

If I am asked, "*How* could devils enter into swine?" I answer, "I don't know." "But," I should add, "neither

do you know that they cannot. If I am not acquainted with the secrets of animal nature, no more are you." But this I do know—that to assume an event to be impossible, simply because we cannot understand how it may come to pass, is an exceedingly absurd proceeding, and, in some cases, such as that now before us, is even more than absurd. And if we want to find good reasons for the Saviour's permission—and the incident that follows it—they are not far for us to seek. There was the poor sufferer himself, who, though rescued from his tyrants, might find comfort in an ocular demonstration of the fact that they were gone. And there was the multitude, who witnessed the scene; and behind them there was another multitude, that of the successive generations of those, who, like you and me, should be virtually spectators of the scene by reading the Gospels, and who had to be convinced that Jesus was dealing with actual personal agents, with actual opponents of His—actual enemies of God and man—though mysterious and unseen, and that He was not going solemnly through a farcical performance, which would have been a discredit to the veriest mountebank and quack that ever appeared upon this mountebank and quack-producing earth of ours.

II.—I have said enough, brethren, about the narrative. Let us draw from it just a couple of simple, but it may be, useful practical conclusions.

First, as to the effect of the miracle upon those who witnessed it—or rather, upon those who heard the report of it immediately after from the actual spectators. They were, of course, the inhabitants of the neighbouring towns and villages; and, amongst them, the owners of the herd of swine. Now, you will observe that these persons do not

question the truth of the report, or the reality of the miracle. How could they? even if they were disposed to do so. The carcases of the swine might be seen still floating on the waters beneath the cliff. The man—whom every one of them so well knew, and so much dreaded—was obviously changed into another creature. No longer frantic and terrible—he was quiet, and calm, and harmless; clothed, and in his right mind. And it was plain enough that Jesus was the agent in all that had taken place. But, although they do not raise a doubt—even a momentary one—they earnestly beseech Jesus to depart out of their coasts. It seems strange—very strange—that they should do so. Has not Jesus come among them as a benefactor? Of course He has. By the word of His power, He has delivered them from what had been a trial and a terror to them, perhaps for years past, and thus given a peace in their dwellings to which they had been strangers for long. Why do they not bless Him, and thank Him, and welcome Him into their houses, and beg Him to sojourn amongst them—as long as He possibly can? Why not? *Because He had destroyed their property—their swine.* These men were Jews. And the trade in which they were engaged was not a legitimate one for them—whatever it might be for others. But, though not legitimate, it was very lucrative—and they did not choose to give it up. Jesus might be benevolent, and certainly He was powerful. But it was clear, also, that He was an enemy of all unrighteousness; and were He to come and stay in Gadara, who could tell what further demands He might make upon them? or how far His presence there might jeopardise some of their most cherished material interests? With His views about purity, and holiness, and

the covenant-duty of the professing people of God—He was a dangerous person to have amongst them ; and they could not feel easy until they saw Him depart. Do we understand this, brethren? It teaches us that, even a strong conviction of the power and of the claims of Christ will not bring men to His side, so long as they are determined to stick to some practice which He condemns, or to indulge in some gratification which He regards as inconsistent with the character of a true disciple.

Our second and last thought is a brighter, and more encouraging one. The narrative gives us hope, in what we may be inclined to regard as the most hopeless cases of abandonment to sin. There can be no doubt, brethren, of the constant interference, in our spiritual life, of those formidable, unseen, evil agents, of whom the Evangelist speaks. Take the very ordinary case of the effacing from the mind of good impressions, which have been produced upon it by the preaching of the Word ; or, the no less ordinary case of insensibility to the claims of Jesus, and to the moral beauty of His character and teachings—which is very largely manifest amongst mankind. The explanation of the first of these phenomena is given by the Lord Himself. You and I, brethren, might be inclined to find it in the feebleness of the preacher's oratory ; or in the pre-occupation of the hearer's mind ; or in some other of the numerous influences which prevent us from really giving heed to an oft-repeated and well-known statement. But the Lord Jesus—not ignoring, perhaps, these external hindrances—detects an unseen mysterious agency behind them, and tells us that, "when any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not" (*i.e.*, does not discern its relation to

himself—its practical bearing upon his own case), “then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart.” And the second explanation is given us by St. Paul—who informs his Corinthian friends that it is “the god of this world who blindeth the minds of them that believe not.” More palpable, however, and more easily recognised, is the agency of the evil spirits in those cases of desperate wickedness, which we not unfrequently hear of—in the furious, ungovernable temper, which seems to approach the very confines of insanity ; or in the power of some strong sensual appetite, which has woven a web of habit round a man so tightly, that it seems impossible for him ever to disentangle himself from its meshes. I do not say that there is an exact correspondence between such cases and the cases of demoniacal possession mentioned in the Gospels. Indeed, I do not think there is. Demoniacal possession seems to have something peculiar and exceptional about it. But we should not greatly err, if we regarded these manifestations of evil as indicating that the sinners in question are more than usually under the influence and dominion of Satan, and that the exertion of more than usual power is required in order to extricate them from their terrible thralldom. But even under such circumstances as these—hopeless as they seem to be—our narrative forbids any man to despair about himself, or about others. Jesus Christ is the same now that He was two thousands years ago. And He who released the poor suffering Gadarene from the grip of the devils that had clutched him—is able and willing to deal successfully now with the most desperate case of inveterate habit, of seemingly incurable propensities, if only it be honestly placed in His powerful and loving hands.

XV.

CONCEPTIONS OF GOD.

“One God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all.”—EPHESIANS iv. 6.

I WILL ask you to notice, before we notice anything else, the limitation introduced into the third and last statement of the text. The Apostle says, in the earlier part of that text, “God is above all.” The expression is thoroughly broad, comprehensive, universal. Above all men, good and bad : above all things, visible and invisible : above every substance that exists, and every being who thinks and feels, stands the one great personal Jehovah—the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The same universality is to be found in the second statement. God is through all : pervading, that is, with His unseen influence, the hearts and lives of the myriads of the human race ; and upholding and sustaining by His power the framework of the material creation in all its varied and multitudinous departments. But when we come to the Apostle’s third and concluding expression, it seems that he has shifted his point of view, and contracted within a narrower compass the broad universality of his original statement. He does not tell us that God is in all, but *in you all* : that is, you who are disciples and followers of

the Lord Jesus Christ, and as such the people of God. And the reason for his change of language is obvious enough. It would be perfectly correct to say that Jehovah is "above all," giving to the word "all" its utmost conceivable amplitude and extent of meaning. Equally correct would it be to affirm that Jehovah is, in a similarly unlimited way, "through all." But when we advance to speak of that mysterious intimacy of the Divine Being with the spirit of man, which is implied in the expression, "being *in* you"—we must be careful to make it plain that this is really the privilege of a certain class, and not, at least not at present, the common inheritance and possession of the entire human race. Here, then, we have the first point to which I wish to direct your attention.

In the next place, I would ask you to notice that the Apostle builds upon this basis of the Fatherhood of the One God, his argument for the preservation of a spirit of unity amongst Christian people. For many reasons, he was most anxious that the Ephesian Church should not be a church divided against itself. Next to the original antagonism of the human heart to the doctrines of the Cross, the greatest and most serious obstruction to the spread of Christianity in the world is to be found in the divisions and dissensions of professing Christians. St. Paul knew this : and knew it of course far better than we do. Convinced he was, that these unhappy differences had their root in the infirmity of human nature, in the self-seeking and self-asserting tendencies, which are not to be ousted all at once by the reception of the Gospel ; and perfectly well aware he was, that the objections founded upon them were not, in truth, objections to religion, but objections to the material upon which religion

has to work ; but he was equally convinced and equally well aware, that the cause of Christ would suffer, and the name of Christ would be blasphemed amongst the heathen—unless there was a manifestation of true unanimity amongst the disciples of the Church of Ephesus. What, then, were the Ephesians to do? They were to be lowly and meek in their intercourse with one another. They were to give way rather than assert their rights, to be patient under provocation, to bear the burden of a brother's infirmity, in fact, to make every endeavour to avoid what was inconsistent with their inward unity. For they are really one, as the Apostle reminds them. They constitute one family, one body, one brotherhood. They are not merely one in sentiment and feeling and purpose and aim (though this would be true enough), but they are one in a far deeper and more important sense—as being brought by the one Holy Spirit into union with the one Lord Jesus Christ, and thus bound up with the great source of light and life, the one God and Father of all.

I have indicated by these preliminary remarks the line upon which I propose to enter in the present discourse, and the topic which it is my intention to bring before you. The general subject has, of course, been suggested to us by the service of the day. We will consider it in two divisions—examining in the former of them the statement of the text ; in the latter, the conclusions as to the unity of the Church, which are built upon that statement, in the argument of the Apostle.

I.—Now, there is, as I presume you know, a conception of the Deity, which seems almost to make Him identical with the works of His own hands. The various phenomena

of the universe, the things which offer themselves to us as objects of our senses, or as materials for our intellectual scrutiny, are nothing else, we are told, than different manifestations of the One ineffable essence. Beneath everything that appears, lies the unseen God. Whatever we may think, there is no other existence than His. We are accustomed to separate Him, in our conception, from the circumstances with which we are surrounded ; but this separation, we are informed, is not, in fact, a possible thing. We talk of the flower, of the wind, the streams, of the stars—as if they might exist, if not apart from the power, at least apart from the essence of God. But this, we are assured, cannot be the case. It is God who blooms in the flower, who breathes in the wind, who flows in the stream, who shines in the star. Yes ! and we ourselves also, with all our notions about a distinct personality, are nothing more than emanations, and will soon be reabsorbed in the source from which we came ; and the countless multitudes of human beings—with their busy employments, with their sorrows and joys, with their thoughts of good and evil—are only the bubbles which rise and disappear in rapid succession upon the surface of that vast and heaving tide of mysterious divine life, which flows on through the ages for ever and ever. This conception of God, Christian brethren, is by no means an uncommon one. It is connected with the habit of looking at the Deity from the physical instead of the moral point of view : from contemplating Him in His works without rising to the idea of a supreme Governor of the universe and Judge of mankind. And it destroys the notion of responsibility, because it attributes every act, whatever its character may be, to the sole agency of the One really existent Being—the invisible

God. You and I may fancy that we think and feel and act and what we call our "conscience" may approve or condemn us, as the case may be. But it is God, after all, who does the thing, who thinks the thought, who performs the deed—and, consequently, both our self-approval and our self-condemnation are totally uncalled for and misplaced.

Now, as I need scarcely remind you, a very different portraiture of the Godhead from this, is presented to us in the pages of Holy Scripture. There we have the awful image of a Being who can exist and did exist, entirely apart from the creations of His own hands. Time was when the Lord God was alone in the vast solitude of His own mysterious eternity. Then He spake the word, and the host of heaven—angels, and archangels; thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers—flashed suddenly into being, and surrounded His throne with adoration and praise. Again, the fiat went forth, and the bright stars gleamed out in the canopy of the sky, and the earth was being prepared, through its long processes of successive change, for the habitation of man. In all these majestic works the power and wisdom and love of the great Creator are manifested; they are, if you like, the garment with which He has clothed Himself—the means by which, in part at least He makes Himself visible to the sons of men; but we do not confound them with His own interior essence; and it is quite conceivable, that if the steps of the great creative process were to be reversed (could such a thing be imagined to happen), if the race of man were to be annihilated, and the material fabric of the universe, with all its glories, were to pass away, and then, as a final step, the bright host of the angels were

to be blotted out of the book of existence, and the Lord God were to be surrounded once more with the awful solitude in which He originally dwelt—it is quite conceivable, I say, that He would suffer no diminution whatever, that He would undergo no impairing—no, not the very slightest—of His inner and essential being. He Himself would remain what He was—the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, the everlasting God—unchangeably the same. You see, then, Christian brethren, the conception of the Godhead which the Bible puts before us. We look up to a God above His works, and not diffused throughout them. As far as the outward universe is concerned, we regard Him as the source and origin of all; not as the mere wondrous artist, who fashions into various forms of beauty or utility the plastic material which He finds ready to His hand, but as the Creator, whose being is separate from the works He has made. As far as the race of man is concerned, we look up to Him as the moral Governor of mankind. He makes His laws, and expects them to be obeyed. Watching, as it were, from above, He notes every deviation from the right way, every violation of His commands, and is ever ready to visit for the transgression, although He is slow to anger and of great kindness. In fact, we echo the language of the Psalmist, and say—“The Lord is in His holy temple: the Lord’s throne is in heaven: His eyes behold, His eyelids try, the children of men.” And this, or something like this, is what the Apostle means when he tells us that God is “above all.”

Again, there is another conception of God, which represents Him as having created the wondrous mechanism of the material universe, with all the living and sentient and

intelligent beings that inhabit it ; and then, as having withdrawn and left the vast system to itself, or at least to the operation of those laws which He had originally impressed upon it. Just as a man makes a clock, selects the material wisely, adjusts the several parts carefully—and then, having set it a-going, departs to busy himself with other matters, or only returns occasionally when some unusual and unexpected disturbance of the machinery makes it necessary for him to interpose ; so, according to this view, does God deal with the world He has made. He constructed it, we are told, with exquisite skill. He placed it under the control of admirable laws. He gave the first impulse, which imparted life to some parts, and the power of motion to others. And now He has withdrawn to a distance. And if He ever returns it is only on some peculiar and exceptional occasions, when disorders have occurred which He alone is competent to rectify. The effect of such a theory of the Godhead as this is, of course, to banish the Deity from His own world ; or at least to make Him so rare a visitant in it that we may afford, practically, to leave Him out of our account. Now, what has St. Paul to say with reference to such a theory as this ? Why he tells us that God is “through all.” And he tells us, in another passage, that “by Jesus Christ all things consist”—that is, are held together. And what he means in these, and in similar statements, is probably something of this kind. God is not to be identified with His works : they are one thing, and He is another ; but neither is He to be cast out of them, and put aside from them. He pervades with His secret and powerful influences the whole of creation. He sustains and upholds. He preserves from collapse and destruction ; and what we call “nature,” is after all really

God. Accordingly, if I watch the growth of a plant, and notice first the tender blade peeping up from under the soil, then the stem rising and the leaves expanding, then the bud—and then the flower, delicately pencilled, rare of fragrance, beautiful in the hues which it spreads out in the light of the sun, I may talk, if I please, of the forces of nature, and the laws of vegetable life, but I ought to detect there the energy and the presence of the personal God. There has been “law” in the matter, no doubt. But “law” only means the way in which God chooses to work. And God has been Himself working here. It was He, behind all the other agencies, who has fashioned this flower. It was not that He commissioned some one else to do it for Him; He did it Himself.

I understand the Apostle to mean this, when he tells us that God is “through all.” But when we come down to the divine dealings with man, the matter is plainer and more unquestionable still. The work of the Lord Jesus Christ: His incarnation: His atonement: His rising again from the dead—has an influence which tells upon the whole human race, and from which they cannot possibly get free. In this sense, by virtue of the redeeming work of Christ, God is “through all.” It is owing to this pervading influence that conscience still moves and stirs, and that there is any unextinguished spark of inclination for better things in the hearts of unregenerate men. It is owing to this that the Spirit of God strives, year after year, with those who are careless and worldly, brings home to them the danger of their position and the mercy of God, draws them sometimes almost to the very verge of decision, and never leaves them until the time when every chance is gone, and the soul, hardened and

stiffened by perpetually repeated acts of rejection has passed into the state of hopelessly impenitent rebellion against eternal righteousness and eternal love. In another sense too, and an important one—God is through all. He mixes with the affairs of men; and in the long run, and on the broad scale, causes the right to prevail. We would not, indeed, venture to say that there are no cases of successful hypocrisy and of undetected crime to be met with in the world. But we need not live very long to know that, as a rule, it answers better to be true than to be false, to be righteous than to be unrighteous, to be real and genuine than to assume, and merely to assume, the appearance of worth. Sometimes indeed wrong-doing appears to prosper for a time. There are successful rogues. There are charlatans, whom everybody seems to believe in. The man stands up (to use the Scriptural image) and flourishes “like a green bay tree.” He holds his head erect. He carries himself haughtily amongst his fellow-men. He is courted—as unhappily every man is courted who achieves success, however he achieves it—and men lie grovelling in the dust, before his power or his gold. But how soon, in many cases, have we seen this pageant pass away. Suddenly, a blight came over the prosperity. There was a worm at the root of that proud and lofty tree. And the leaves decayed, and the branches withered, and the fruit dropped off: the glory and the splendour departed, and now a white and blasted skeleton, the mere shell of what once was, remains occupying indeed its former site, but stretching out dead, bare arms, without the vestige of a leaf upon them—furnishing a jest for the thoughtless, and sad reflections for those who look tenderly upon human life. And what is this, but the direct inter-

ference of God in the affairs of men? What is it, but that a personal and a righteous Jehovah pervades our ordinary existence, and even here, even before the Day of Judgment overthrows unrighteousness, and visibly destroys the success which unrighteousness may happen to have achieved.

Yet again, God is through all, in the sense of controlling and arranging for His own great ends all the events which are taking place upon the theatre of this earth of ours. It seems a complicated affair—this world in which we live. Infinite are the confusions, the combinations, the vicissitudes, the conflicts of wills which we see around us. Yes! but though we may be perplexed, God is not. He does not stand aloof, but fits everything into His mighty plan. And if the Bible is to be credited—while politicians scheme, and warriors fight, and philosophers fashion their theories, and statesmen form plans which are to change the destinies of half the human race; and whilst ordinary men and women like ourselves are engaged in providing for their households, and in making their way honestly through the world; and whilst every one is intent upon his own schemes and plans, thinking little or nothing about their general bearing—the Lord who sitteth above the waterfloods, and who sees the end from the beginning, is engaged in moulding these multitudinous events to the accomplishment of His own purposes—and through all and by all is bringing about the manifestation of His Son's glory in the manifestation of the sons of God.

Thus have we considered together what the Apostle probably means when he speaks of God being "above all and through all:" we have yet the third statement to examine. God says St. Paul is "in you all." He points

here, as I have already reminded you, to what is the peculiar privilege, the distinguishing characteristic of the true disciple of Jesus Christ. What is a Christian? Not merely a man who displays certain excellencies of character, who is pure in life, conscientious in his dealings, upright in his conversation, kind and charitable and forgiving, respectful to his Saviour, and attentive to the ordinances of religion. Not this alone, though all this is essential to the possession of the spiritual life. But much more than this. "If any man," says the Apostle, "have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His." And the Christian is a man in whose inmost being, in the recesses of whose soul, God the Holy Ghost has taken up his abode. In saying such things, we are sometimes charged with mysticism. We cannot help it. There *is* that which is mystical in all true religion. And this is most plain—that what constitutes a Christian is the indwelling of God. Yes! the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, who fills all space with His presence—to whom we cannot dare, even in imagination, to set bounds—contracts Himself to the narrow dimensions of a human heart, and condescends to enter as a resident into the soul of every true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. A mysterious residence, but a most real one! It is the Spirit who comes into contact with our spirit, and thus making us one with Christ, brings us into union with the dread majesty of the eternal Father.

II.—We reserve a short space (it is all we can afford) for the second topic of our discourse—the unity of Christians. That God meant us to think alike, to see truth from precisely the same point of view, to adopt the same rules and regulations, and the same mode of worship, seems

highly improbable—considering the marked differences there are in human character. But that God meant us all, amidst allowable differences, to love as brothers, to bear with one another, and to show to the world, by every means in our power, the real, substantial unity of thought and feeling which does exist among Christian people—is perfectly certain. And this we may say, that, in proportion as we realise that oneness depends not upon our voluntary association but upon a far deeper root—even upon our union with the Lord Jesus Christ—we shall almost instinctively cultivate charity, and avoid everything that bears even the appearance of dissension and discord. Christians are really one; one through the possession and indwelling of the same Spirit. God their Father is above them all and through them all and in them all. When they remember this they will find that differences will largely disappear, and that love will prevail. And men will glorify Christ because His disciples, in spite of the selfishness of human nature, and in the midst of the struggles and contentions of human life, have found themselves able to love one another.



XVI.

WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?

“What think ye of Christ?”—MATT. xxii. 42 (part).

WE gather from the context that the adversaries of the Lord Jesus Christ, embittered by His growing popularity with the people, had determined to entangle Him in His talk, and thus to compromise Him with the civil and ecclesiastical authorities of the nation. They were the more confident of success in their attempt, because they knew Him to be utterly devoid of fear. To use their own language—He “regarded not the person of men,” and therefore they felt He would be sure—if He thought the truth of God was in any way concerned—to utter His opinion, without the slightest consideration of the consequences to Himself. For the rest they trusted to their own trained and practised acumen, to weave such a web of sophistry round Him that it should be perfectly impossible for Him to escape unharmed from its dangerous and deadly grasp. In pursuance of this intention, they present themselves in succession, with much apparent simplicity of manner, and with much apparent earnestness of purpose, to ask for the solution of some important questions; about which they profess themselves to stand in doubt. First come the Pharisees, or rather, some of their disciples, with

a party of Herodians, and propose the difficulty about the tribute-money. When these have received their reply—one, as you will remember, that perfectly confounds and silences them—the Sadducees advance to the front with an enquiry, by which they hope to reduce to an absurdity the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. They, too, have to retire baffled and ashamed, whilst the tide of enthusiasm for the wondrous Galilean Teacher obviously rises higher and higher amongst the surrounding multitude. On hearing of the discomfiture of the Sadducees, the Pharisees, gathering up themselves for an effort, advance to the attack, and put forward one of their number with a question of a subtle kind, about the relative value of the commandments of the Law. This man, too, gets his answer—an answer, which for its simplicity and power, extorts the admiration of some of the more candid of the Saviour's opponents; and then, for a moment the interrogating ceases. At this juncture the Saviour Himself sees fit to become the assailant. Turning to the dense group of Pharisees, He asks them, the question of our text—"What think ye of Christ? whose son is He?"

Now observe, brethren, that these men were the divines of the day, the teachers of the nation, the authorised expounders of the Word of God, who claimed to carry in their hand the key of all knowledge, and to understand the hidden mysteries of the spiritual kingdom. These men ought to have known—if any knew—who the Christ was to be. Observe again, that to a Jew, the question was one of paramount, indeed, of overwhelming importance. His very reason of existence was, that in due time he might produce the Christ to the world at large. What did the whole

Mosaic system mean, if it did not mean *that*? And if so—there must be something strange—indeed, there must be something glaringly wrong—if those, who represented the system, and administered its ordinances, entertained confused, or false, or mistaken ideas concerning the nature and character of Him who was intended to be, as it were, the outgrowth and flower of the nation—the fulfilment of the great purpose, for which it had been called out and created by God. Imperfect knowledge on the subject there might be, nay, there must be, for the revelation was gradual. But views on the subject fundamentally erroneous there ought not to be, and there would not be, unless there was something very greatly and radically amiss.

But let us go back to the narrative. On hearing the question, the Pharisees were ready with their rejoinder. "Whose son is the Christ? why, 'the son of David,' of course." And probably they are surprised at the simplicity of the question. It seems to be one that the youngest child in the assembly could answer, and answer at once. Yes! but there is another question coming—not quite so easy to dispose of. In a certain Psalm—well-known to all, and recognised by all as referring to Messiah—a Psalm of David—written, by universal acknowledgment, under the direct inspiration of the Spirit of God—David addresses Messiah as "his Lord." Now, how can that be, if Messiah is his son, and *only* his son? Surely there must be some other relation between them, than the relation of mere descent implied in the reply of the Pharisees! What is that relation? "He saith unto them, How then doth David in Spirit call Him Lord, saying, the Lord said unto my Lord, sit Thou on My right hand, till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool? It

David, then, call Him Lord, how is He his son?" The true answer to this enquiry—the answer, I mean, that Messiah is human on one side, and divine on the other—the Pharisees were either unwilling, or unable to give; and so they, somewhat ignominiously, held their peace. Nor did they venture to renew their attacks. "No man was able to answer Him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask Him any more questions."

Let us now make it our business to consider, as the main subject of the present discourse, why these Pharisees were so seriously to blame for their ignorance in the matter of the real character of Christ.

I.—In the first place, then, it was ignorance on a subject, which is of all subjects the most vitally important. There were some kinds of knowledge, brethren, with which these Jews might very well have been able to dispense. The lessons of history, for instance, or the teaching of science, or the speculations of philosophy, or the melodious strains of the musician and the poet—well, acquaintance with these things would be undoubtedly an advantage in the way of the expansion of the intellect, and the cultivation of the taste; but it would not, after all, be a *necessity* for the highest well-being of the man—either in this world, or in the world to come. One thing, however, would be absolutely needed for the purpose, and that was—the knowledge of God. Without the knowledge of God, possessed at least in some degree, it is hard to conceive of the possibility of that thing which we are accustomed to call "salvation."

But then, God can only be known in Christ. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father," says the Lord. Christ, then, is the expression of the mind of God, yea, the

expression of God Himself. When God would come forth to the view of men, so that they may see Him, and understand Him, He comes forth in Christ. It is in Christ that He manifests what He is. Much of God you can discern in creation. His power and His wisdom, for instance—"For the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth His handiwork"—but His inner Being, His moral nature, His feelings, His heart, can only be seen in Jesus Christ. There is no knowledge, then, comparable in importance to the knowledge of this particular subject. And to be ignorant of Christ, is to be ignorant of all that concerns the highest destinies, the truest interests of a human creature. To be ignorant of Christ, is to wander in darkness, and to have no light. To be ignorant of Christ, is to mislead others, and to be misled yourself. For this ignorance no other knowledge will compensate—no amount of intellectual ability, no accumulated stores of learning. This, then, was the last subject about which the Pharisees ought to have been in error, the more especially, as they professed to be the spiritual guides and instructors of the people to whom they belonged.

II.—In the second place—the ignorance of these men referred to a subject, with which they had ample means of making themselves acquainted. Had they been like the Heathen, debarred from the chiefest sources of information, they had not been blamable, or, at least, had not been blamable to the same extent. But, as it was, every opportunity of making themselves acquainted with the real character of the coming Christ, had been within their reach. To them had been committed the oracles of God. They had in their hands the Holy Scriptures—Moses and the

prophets—those wonderful documents, which were full of Messiah, which spoke of Messiah continually ; through which the thought of Messiah's person and Messiah's work ran like a golden thread, binding them together into a coherent and harmonious whole. This was one advantage—and a great one—that they possessed. They were planted, too, in the midst of a system, which in every part of it pointed to Messiah, and which was meaningless without Him. The sacrifices and offerings, the Temple-ceremonial, the appointment and services of the Priesthood, the cleansings and purifications—what were these, but so many bright lines, which converged towards the one great central figure—the Christ of God? This was another advantage. Their daily lives, too whether they knew it or not, were full of Christ. Christ's image was stamped upon their homes, their families, upon their very food ; Christ was with them in their downsitting and their uprising, in their going out and their coming in, in their farms and fields, and ordinary business, as well as when they gathered round the family altar for family prayer, or went up on the Sabbath, or on the day of solemn assembly, to join the worshipping congregation in the house of God. In fact, they were prepared for Messiah, made for Messiah's purposes, fashioned for Messiah's glory ; and if they were ignorant of Messiah must they not have been very deeply, and indeed, unpardonably to blame? But there is more to be said. Not so long ago—it was only three years ago—a man had appeared amongst them, who recalled in a most vivid way the wondrous past of Jewish history, when God had interposed for the maintenance of His own cause, and for the overthrow of His enemies. This man's voice,

pealing like thunder from the wilderness, had disturbed the calm complacency of Jerusalem sacerdotalism, and roused the nation from one side to the other. And what did that voice proclaim? "This is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." And yet again—since that proclamation—throughout the three years, Jesus Himself had been amongst them—*His own best evidence*—embodying in His own person, in His acts, in His words, in His manner—all that the Scriptures had stated, or symbolised, concerning the Messiah. There He was before their eyes, corresponding in every feature, corresponding with the most perfect exactitude, with the portrait drawn by Lawgiver, and Prophet, and Psalmist, and holy men of old—appealing to His works, the signs and evidences of His divine mission; but appealing more emphatically to Himself, and with a pathetic, longing, touching eagerness, entreating them to recognise Him as what He was, and accept Him as their Saviour and their Friend.

All these advantages, brethren, the Pharisees had—the Scriptures, the Mosaic system, the testimony of John the Baptist, the presence of Jesus Himself—and yet, they remained ignorant of the true nature and character of Christ. When they were asked a searching question about Him, they were unable to give an answer. They were absolutely dumb.

III. Let us consider, then, in the third place—why they were unable to give an answer; why they were ignorant on a subject, about which they, of all men, ought to have been informed. You have noticed, of course, that the opinion of these Pharisees about the Christ was correct, so far as it went. He was the Son of David—the offspring of David.

There they were right enough. But their view was partial and one-sided ; for the Messiah, according to the Scripture, was to be not only "the offspring" of David, but also the "root" of David—the source of his existence, the sustaining principle of his influence and his power. Of these truths they were ignorant. And what was the consequence? That one great field of knowledge was entirely closed against them, and that they formed an inadequate and incorrect idea of what the Christ must be ; and therefore were prepared to reject the real Christ when He presented Himself for their reception.

And are we to say, that this mistake of theirs was the mere result of intellectual confusion? of a feeble grasp of thought? I think not. Had it been so, the Pharisees would have been blameless. The fact is, that they did (what we are, all of us, too much inclined to do) they read their own ideas into Scripture, and determined to find in Scripture only what they wished to find there. The Old Scriptures clearly put Messiah before us in two distinct aspects. Messiah is, as we have already said, both the root and the offspring of David. He is at once David's Lord and David's Son. He is "the child," and the "ancient of days." He is the "man of sorrows," and "the mighty God." He is the humiliated Christ, and the glorious and exalted Christ. He is the King, who ascends the eternal throne, to reign there at the right hand of God ; and He is also the King, who reaches His seat of glory by treading the road of pain, and shame, and suffering, and death. These two sides of thought meet in the one Christ. In Him, these two sets of apparently incompatible ideas find their centre and fulfilment. And so it comes to pass,

that His person is unique, and His name is wonderful. Now, to the ideas of humiliation, and suffering, and death—these Pharisees deliberately and resolutely shut their eyes. They would have none of them! Such a Christ was not the Christ of their choice. Their Christ was to be the reigning, triumphant, glorious Christ. This—and nothing else. And whatever statements of Scripture did not fall in with their notions, were explained away, or ignored, or, after some fashion or other, conveniently disposed of.

You see, then, how it is, brethren. To put it in few words—a one-sided Christ is no Christ at all. And those who do not accept Him as they find Him in Scripture, who form their conceptions of what He ought to be, and must be, instead of taking the testimony of the Spirit concerning Him—are in danger of losing the blessings which He comes to bestow upon the human race.

IV.—So far we have been considering the case of the Pharisees. Let us turn, for the few moments that remain, to ourselves.

I do not know that you and I run much risk of taking a heterodox view of the person of Jesus Christ. Probably we are, all of us, sound enough in the faith. We believe about Jesus Christ, according to the teaching of the Creeds, which we so continually recite in our Church of England service. Our danger seems to me to be rather of a practical kind; and it may be, I think, well for us all—for me as well as for you—to reflect, that if we separate the offices of Christ—as the Pharisees separated the Scriptural statements about Christ—it will be only too likely that Christ will profit us nothing. But let me explain my meaning more distinctly. We acknowledge Christ as our

Prophet, Priest, and King—our Prophet, to reveal God to us ; our Priest to make atonement, to bless, and to intercede for us ; our King, to rule us. Now, these three things constitute the whole Christ, and must go together. No one must be separated from the rest. We must not have a one-sided Christ. In other words—if we do not obey His commandments, and submit ourselves to His rule, and endeavour, God helping us, in all sincerity and earnestness to follow His example—it is perfectly useless to suppose that we are availing ourselves of His teaching, or that we are in anywise profited by His atoning blood. Those who accept Christ as King in the conduct of their daily lives, benefit by Christ as their Priest and Prophet. Those—and those only.

“What think ye of Christ ?” Brethren, there is no question, in importance and solemnity, at all comparable with this. On the answer which we can give to it depends our present position with God, depend our prospects of eternity. “What think ye of Christ ?” Can we not reply to the question something of this kind—“I think of Him, not only as the Son of God incarnate ; not only as the great, mysterious Being, who came down from Heaven, and suffered, and died, and rose again, and is now at the right hand of the Majesty on High ; not only as the loving Saviour of men ; not only as the Prophet and Priest of His Church ; but I think of Him also as *my* Saviour, *my* Advocate with the Father, as the source of light and life, and every blessing of *my* soul, as the giver of *my* peace and strength, *my* loving companion and *my* sympathising friend now, and *my* everlasting portion in that period of boundless ages, into which I shall pass when I enter into the rest that remaineth for the people of God.”

XVII.

THE PEOPLE AND THE LAND.

“And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children’s children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever.”—EZEKIEL xxxvii. 25.

THERE are some papers laid in the pews, which I beg of you to carry away with you when you leave the Church, and to read at your leisure at home. They concern a society, in which I am deeply interested, and for which some day I hope to secure a measure of your sympathy and support. But for the present I make no appeal for it. And I beg you to understand at the outset, that there will not be any collection at all this morning.

But I shall avail myself of the opportunity thus given me of discussing with you once more, what is sometimes called the “Jewish question.” As it happens, the thirty-seventh chapter of the Prophecies of Ezekiel, which bears very distinctly upon the subject, and which has provided me with a text—is one of the two alternative first lessons for the evening’s service. This chapter—so convenient for my purpose—I will endeavour to bring before you as a whole; and we will begin by examining that remarkable vision with which it opens.

I.—We are told, then, that, on a certain occasion, the hand of the Lord was upon Ezekiel, and that the prophet found himself carried in vision into the midst of a vast and open valley. The scene was a gloomy one; the mountains overhanging the plain were high and frowning; the shades of night were beginning to fall; dense masses of cloud were gathering on the horizon; and there was not a single cheerful ray of light anywhere to enliven the landscape. But the sombreness of it, after all, was chiefly owing to the fact that the valley was covered in every direction by thousands upon thousands of human bones. It seemed as if in years gone by two great armed hosts had met in that place, in the shock of a determined conflict. The carnage had been tremendous, and the survivors few; and it had been found impossible to bury the dead, and there the corpses had lain for days, for months, for years—strewing the surface of the ground. Many a time, as they lay there, the mountain wolves had come down from their forests, and their fastnesses, and glutted themselves with the flesh of the fallen warriors. Many a time, as the seasons rolled by, the winter winds had sighed over the whitening skeletons, and the hot suns of the summer had bleached them; and now, when the prophet paced round and round the dreary scene of desolation, the thought which occurs to him is this: “Behold! there are very many in the open valley: and lo! they are very dry.” Just then, amidst the painful silence that brooded over the valley, a voice—the voice of his heavenly Guide—broke in upon Ezekiel’s ear: “Son of man, can these bones live?” Ah! it seemed impossible. With a man just dead, or recently dead, there might be imagined to be some flicker of vitality about him, wherewith

to justify the idea of resurrection. But these dry bones—the last sapless remnants of the bodily tabernacle—who could anticipate for them that they should arise and live? The prophet, however, well knowing that nothing is too hard for the Lord, simply and unhesitatingly replies: “O Lord God! Thou knowest.” Again he hears the voice: Prophecy over these bones: and bid them hear the word of the Lord.” “A most useless proceeding,” many would have said. Not so the prophet. Trust in God, and obedience to the divine command, is the law of his life. And at once he complies. God bids, and that is enough for Ezekiel. He speaks—and no sooner has he spoken, than the effect follows. A low noise of thunder is heard; the ground rocks and quivers under the heavings of an earthquake; and the dead bones begin to stir. Each of them, drawn by a singular and irresistible attraction, moves to his fellow-bone; and presently the perfect skeletons are formed in every part of the vast battlefield. The wonderful process continues. Rapidly the sinews, the flesh, the skin, creep up over the skeletons, and the warriors are there again in bodily form. But the forms are not yet living forms. There is no breath in them. A second time, then, the prophet is bidden to speak over these myriads of unbreathing corpses, and to call upon the Spirit to come from the four winds, and blow upon these slain, that they may live. He obeys. And immediately the strong and stalwart figures—endued with life—stand up upon their feet, rank themselves once more in battle array (though, as it would seem, not forming two bodies, but coalescing into one), and present the spectacle of an exceeding great army.

Now, how are we to interpret this vision? No doubt

it may be regarded as describing the effects of the preaching of the Gospel to men dead in trespasses and in sins. The whole world lieth, we are told, in the evil one—steeped in the profound slumber of ignorance and error, or unconscious of the true God, as if He did not exist; and what wakes them up and puts life into them, is that which men regard as the “foolishness of preaching,” the simple proclamation of the love of Christ; the message of salvation carried home to the heart by the inspiring breath of God the Holy Ghost. This is an important lesson, of course; and such a magnificent vision, as that of the valley of dry bones, might well be employed to accentuate it and to enforce it upon us. But, as you have probably observed, the prophet—or rather, the Lord by the prophet—gives us another and a more limited, and perhaps more important explanation. When Ezekiel is pondering over what he has seen, and endeavouring to fathom its meaning, he is told that the bones represent “the whole house of Israel.” At the time of speaking, the Jewish people were spiritually dead; out of their own land, and, as it were, in a grave. But there will be—Ezekiel is informed—a resurrection for them. “The Lord will put forth His power, and cause them to come up out of their graves, and will put His Spirit in them, and they shall live; and He will place them in their own land.”

Taking, then, this divine explanation of the vision, it naturally occurs to us to ask: “When, and under what circumstances was this prophecy fulfilled? if it has been fulfilled—or is it yet awaiting its fulfilment in the future?” If we should be inclined to reply that it was fulfilled at the time when the Jews returned from the Babylonian cap-

tivity, it may be as well to remind ourselves for a moment of the real character of that event. There was nothing startling about it. It was felt, of course, both by the Jews themselves, and also by the more thoughtful among the heathen, that it betokened the goodness of Jehovah, and the fact that He was still watching over the interests of His chosen people. "The Lord hath done great things for them," said the heathen. "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad," echoed the Jews. But it was chiefly on account of its significance for the future, and not of its grandeur for the present, that the incident of their return from exile so called forth the gratitude of the Jewish people. The whole number that returned, including "servants" (who were probably foreigners), was something under fifty thousand persons, all told—less than the population of a city of the ordinary size—whilst the bulk of the nation remained behind in Babylon, amidst the comforts and luxuries to which they had become accustomed, and at safe distance from the restraints, which they would inevitably have had to submit to had they once again crossed the border of the sacred territory. Was this, brethren, an event at all corresponding in magnificence? in extent? in importance? in the effect which it produced upon the world at large—to the vision which passed, in its sombre majesty, before the eyes of the Prophet Ezekiel? One would think not. Would it not rather seem that the vision—even if we allow it were partially fulfilled in the return from Babylon—points to something yet to be disclosed in the future; especially when the Apostle Paul tells us (in language which surely is coloured by the remembrance of this passage) that the effect of the *future* conversion of

Israel is to resemble a resurrection: "If the casting away of them" (*i.e.*, of Israel) "is the reconciling of the world: what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?"

However, leaving this point for the present, let us pass on to a second—in fact, to the second division of the chapter.

II.—The vision of the valley of dry bones is for the prophet himself. What is recorded next, is for the information of the people to whom he ministered. Ezekiel is directed to take two sticks: that is to say, in all probability, two pieces of flat and smooth wood, on each of which a sentence in Hebrew characters may be inscribed. On one he is to write the words—"For Judah and for the children of Israel his companions." Now do you understand what that means? When the great rupture took place, and the ancient people had broken up into two distinct kingdoms—a southern and a northern one—Judah and Benjamin hung together from the first; and then, when Jeroboam's plans about religion had definitely declared themselves, a large number of Levites, dissatisfied with his mode of procedure, came to Judah and Jerusalem, leaving their possessions behind them; and then, at a somewhat later period, the body was augmented by small additions from two or three other tribes—the defection probably occurring amongst the more spiritual and earnest part of the people, who were anxious to worship the God of their fathers in the Temple at Jerusalem. By the legend, then—"Judah, and the children of Israel his companions"—is meant, Judah, together with Benjamin, and with those other tribesmen—whether Levites or not—who had chosen to cast in their lot with the

southern kingdom, though properly speaking, they belonged to the north. This legend was to be inscribed on one of the two flat pieces of wood.

On the other were to be written the words—"For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim : and all the house of Israel his companions." And what this signifies, is obvious enough. The tribe of Ephraim (Ephraim representing his father Joseph) was the leader in the revolt. The other tribes joined Ephraim, with the exception, of course, of those of which mention has just been made. "Ephraim," then, "and his companions," stand on one side ; "Judah, and his companions," stand on the other—each being symbolised by his own flat piece of wood, or tablet, with certain Hebrew characters written upon it. Now, these two tablets, thus prepared, are to be taken into the prophet's hand, and whilst thus held together, are to be miraculously (as I understand it) welded into one. But let me quote the passages, that you may judge for yourselves : "Join them for thee one to another into one stick ; that they may become one in thy hand." "Thus saith the Lord God—I will take the stick of Joseph, and will put them with it, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in My hand."

I think you will agree with me, brethren, that the mere holding of the two tablets in the same hand does not sufficiently exhaust the meaning of the words. Nor can it be readily believed that, if the simple juxtaposition of the tablet had been all, the people who witnessed the prophet's action would have troubled themselves much to inquire into the signification of his procedure? It is far more likely that there was something supernatural in the matter—the two

plain, unmarked faces of the tablets, being suddenly joined together in such a way, that it was impossible to separate them. And now, the people come crowding round Ezekiel. "What does it all mean?" they ask. A question which we will take the liberty of taking into our mouths. It means that a time was approaching when the two distinct, and indeed, antagonistic sections, of the Jewish family would wonderfully coalesce again, and form one people under one king; and that the event would be so remarkable, as to attract the attention of the world at large. "I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all, saith the Lord God."

Here, again, it will occur to us to inquire, whether this statement belongs to the province of fulfilled or of unfulfilled prophecy? And if to the former—when did the fulfilment take place? Supposing we reply: "It took place at the return from the Babylonian captivity." Well, before we accept this answer as satisfactory and final, let us just pause to consider. At the time of the incident with which we are now concerned—I mean, of course, the prophesying of Ezekiel—Judah had been in captivity some seventy years. But Ephraim had been in captivity more than two hundred. Shalmaneser first, and Nebuchadnezzar afterwards, had carried away the inhabitants of the northern kingdom, and placed them somewhere (it is difficult to say where) in the utmost part of their vast dominions. Now, in the course of two hundred years, it is impossible to suppose (when we remember the marvellous fertility of the Jewish people) that these ten tribes should not have increased to a very considerable multitude. What then? Why, then, at the time of the return from Babylonian exile, there were thousands

and tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of these Jews of the northern kingdom, somewhere in Asia. Did they—or did any appreciable portion of them return with Judah from Babylon? There is no record of such an event to be found anywhere. Are there any credible historians, to whom we might appeal on the subject? Yes! There are Ezra and Nehemiah—men who knew, and men who made accurate catalogues of the returning exiles. Do they say anything about Ephraim joining Judah? No! Were Ezra and Nehemiah aware of the prophecy of Ezekiel (that concerning the two tablets) which was addressed to all the people? Of course they were. If, then, that prophecy had been fulfilled in the return from the Babylonian captivity—would they not have pointed to the fact, as the accomplishment of God's predicted purpose concerning His ancient people? Of course, they would. But they say nothing. Why? Because there was nothing to say. And, indeed, brethren, when you remember that the whole number of returning exiles was something under fifty thousand, we can scarcely venture to assert that so striking a prediction—and a prediction so solemnly introduced as that of Ezekiel—could have been fulfilled by the introduction of some hundreds of the "lost tribes" (as they are called) amongst the ranks of Judah—even if those hundreds had been actually known to have joined in the enterprise. It seems, then, more reasonable to suppose that the reunion—the coalescing of Ephraim with Judah—is an event which has never yet occurred in the past history of God's ancient people; and that consequently it is to happen in the future.

Let me ask you to take with me one short step more. Will you look at that single verse—verse 25—which I have

selected for my text? Mention is made in it of the land (God Himself, as you will remember, being the speaker). "They," this united people, "shall dwell in the land which I have given unto Jacob My servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt." The description is precise enough. A land spoken of in such terms must be Palestine, and no other. Next—"they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever." But at the present moment they are out of the land. They must return to it, then. Is not that clear? Once more—"My servant David" (and by that expression is meant, in such prophetic utterances—Messiah Himself) "shall be their Prince for ever." But has He been their Prince yet? No! They rejected Him as a nation, and they reject Him still. His rule, then—the rule of King Messiah over the people of Judah and of Isreal—united once more in their own land—is something to take place in the future. And it is to endure (saith the Lord) "for ever."

III.—I put these three things together, brethren—the vision granted to the prophet; the symbolical action done in the face of the people; the plain, straightforward statement of our text—and I feel drawn irresistibly to the following conclusions, which I would venture to propose for your candid consideration. That the Jewish people are not to be gradually absorbed into the Christian Church by Missionary effort, because that process of absorption would be a quiet and ordinary one, with nothing peculiar or startling about it—one that, even were its scale unusually great, would produce but little impression upon the world at large. That when the Jewish nation is brought to the acceptance of Jesus Christ—it will be by means so special, that every eye

will be fixed upon the event, and every heart will feel that God has interposed to make His presence and working known and recognised. Their conversion, in fact, will be a resurrection—its extreme unlikelihood, and yet its absolute certainty, being foreshadowed by the vision of Ezekiel, which we have discussed together this morning. And lastly, that when all Israel shall thus be “saved” (as St. Paul expresses it)—when, that is, the whole united people shall have accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour—then will begin the times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord ; and with them all those bright and happy and pure and glorious things, which the writings of the prophets have led us to expect, and the advent of which every true-hearted servant of Jesus Christ is, in some way or other, striving and labouring to do his best, for God’s sake and for man’s sake, to hasten forward.



XVIII.

THE UNSPEAKABLE GIFT.

“Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.”—2 COR. ix. 15.

THIS is a somewhat abrupt exclamation. It stands out from the rest of the chapter, just as we have seen a rock stand like a tall pillar on the seashore, isolated from the cliff of which it once formed part; and we naturally ask, “What is the connection in the Apostle’s mind between this verse and all that has gone before?” A connection, we suppose there is; indeed, there must be. But what is it? Let us begin, then, the discussion of our topic of this morning, by endeavouring to answer the question.

Now, the Apostle has been expending two whole chapters upon the subject of a certain collection which has been made, or is being made, amongst the Gentile Churches for the benefit of the poor and needy Christians of Jerusalem. I am not quite sure that it was to the credit of the Corinthians that they should require, in so simple a matter, so much elaborate exhortation. But that they did require it, is clear enough; and the Apostle, feeling the necessity, goes round the whole topic of almsgiving, presenting it in every point of view, and urging his readers to habitual

liberality in dealing with the case of those less happily situated as to worldly goods than they are themselves. You will probably remember the line he takes. But it will not be out of place, perhaps, if I venture to recall it to your minds in as few words as possible.

There was a famine coming. The prophets in the Christian Church had foretold it, and every disciple, of course, believed in the certainty, and indeed in the imminence, of the event. Under these circumstances, the greatest sufferers were sure to be the members of the little community in Jerusalem, who were always in a state of chronic poverty—as lying under the shadow of the great Mosaic system, and of the powerful ecclesiasticism which still pervaded it ; and the Apostle, as he journeyed through the Gentile Churches, besought and entreated the members of them, and indeed urged it upon them as a distinct duty, to contribute bountifully of their substance for the relief of their Jewish brethren in that distant city. To this appeal the Corinthian Church made a ready response—at least, in the way of promise. At once they began gathering, a year before St. Paul's second Epistle to them was written—and all seemed well. But somehow (I do not know how it was, I suppose they were impulsive people, and got tired of the thing when the first outburst of charitable sentiment had passed), somehow, the collection stopped—it was apparently forgotten altogether ; and when the time came for the cash to be forwarded to Jerusalem, there was little, if anything, done ; and everybody was behindhand. The Apostle saw, of course, how the matter stood, and spoke out. He did not upbraid the Corinthians for disappointing him in this way. To do so, would have been neither right nor wise. But he pressed the matter with

unusual urgency upon them, piling up reason upon reason for their complying with his request, and really leaving them no loophole of escape ; and then, at the end of the second chapter—seeming to regard the money as sent—he paints a vivid picture of the effect produced by their liberality upon the Christians at Jerusalem. There is, he says, great rejoicing amongst these poor people for this most opportune supply of their need. From no near source could they expect deliverance to come. Always in straits, through the pressure of persecution, they were on the verge of extreme privation when the bounty of the Corinthians lifted them out of despair ; put courage into the hearts of parents, who could only anticipate the slow starvation of their children before their eyes ; caused the heart of the sick, and the helpless, and the widow to sing for joy ; and the result was that a loud chorus of praise and thanksgiving to God rose in every direction from the Christian households throughout the entire city.

But this is not all. There is even a brighter side to the picture which the Apostle draws. This liberal distribution is interpreted—and rightly interpreted—by the saints at Jerusalem as a remarkable manifestation of the grace of God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Never, till Christianity came in with its healing and kindly influences, had it been found that Gentiles would take any interest in Jews, or Jews take any interest in Gentiles. Mutual jealousies and misunderstandings held the two races apart, and by degrees, an impassable barrier had risen up, and established itself between them. The barrier, Jesus Christ had thrown down. And now, the proof of His having done so—the proof of the power which His Gospel exercises over the human

heart—is exhibited in a most substantial form, in the fact that Gentiles of Corinth, and Antioch, and Philippi, and Athens, and of the towns of Asia Minor, had cheerfully joined together in contributing to the relief of persons whom—not only had they never seen in the flesh—but whom they had been accustomed, until the time of their conversion, to regard with the most absolute antipathy and contempt. Together, then, with thankfulness for the boon itself, another and a higher thankfulness pervaded their hearts for this signal triumph of the Gospel. God had wrought wonders in Gentile, and indeed in Jewish, hearts. He had made Jew and Gentile one in Christ. To Him be all the glory! It is His work, and His alone. And the Apostle sees, rising up from the Church of Jerusalem, the incense of praise—praise for deliverance; but more than this—of praise to God for the influence which He exercises over human hearts, and for the power He possesses to weld men together into a loving brotherhood; and as he beholds the fair spectacle, he is reminded of the great gift of God's love, and breaks out into the irrepressible exclamation: "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift!"—that is to say, "I bless God for His goodness, manifested in the loving feeling which has been called out between the Gentile and the Jewish Churches; but much more do I bless Him for the marvel of His goodness in that gift—the breadth, length, and depth, and height of which it is impossible for us to gauge—the gift of His only begotten Son." And, if so, the practical inference which we may draw from the whole passage is this—that in every rightly instructed Christian mind the feeling of gratitude for blessings received, whether they be temporal or spiritual,

instinctively leads up to the recollection and the recognition of what God has done for us in not sparing His Son, but giving Him up for us all. Let us take this thought with us in our farther discussion of the subject.

Now, the air is full at the present moment of the sound of Harvest Thanksgiving. We are engaged, both in cathedrals and common churches, in the commemoration of one particular act of the divine goodness—the bountiful provision that has been once again made, in the produce of the earth, for the supply of our bodily wants. We remember—and thankfully remember—that “God opens His hand, and satisfieth the desires of every living thing.” We remember—and thankfully remember—that, however numerous may be the inhabitants of this globe of ours, there would be enough and to spare for all—if the divine bounty were properly dealt with; and that if there be in any quarter of the world scarcity, want, destitution, unsatisfied human hunger, the fault is not to be traced to any defect in God’s arrangements, but simply to the folly and sin and mismanagement of man himself. Starting from this topic, we take a long step, and rise to the contemplation of the supreme act of the divine goodness—the supreme cause for our thankfulness—in the gift of the Son of God. More than food and plenty, more than health and strength, more than the comfort of our homes, more than life itself, is this great bestowment, in which the divine love towards us is so amazingly manifested. The Apostle tells us that it is “unspeakable;” by which I suppose he means, that it is impossible for our minds to conceive the whole significance of it, and impossible for our words to describe it. Still, it is open to us, although the subject is so vast, to learn some-

thing more about it ; to advance in acquaintance with that which we shall only then fully understand, when the light of eternity has dawned upon us, and we shall know even as also we are known. And this we will now make it our endeavour to do.

The word "gift" suggests two simple lines of thought. There is, first, the value of the gift to him who receives it. There is, secondly, the cost of the gift to him who bestows it.

I.—Taking the first thought first, it is obvious to say, that in the bestowment of Christ we have everything that we require for our spiritual equipment and supply. Suppose that a friend presents me with a large and valuable bank-note—say, for some thousands of pounds—I shall have, in the possession of that little piece of paper, the virtual possession of everything which my heart desires, up to the extent to which such a sum of money is competent to procure it for me. If I am a student, I shall be supplied with books, and leisure to use them ; with teachers, and other opportunities of gaining instruction. If I am a man weighted with the burden of a family, I shall be provided, to a certain extent at least, with the means of giving them education, and of getting them out in the world. Should I be in debt, I may relieve myself from my liabilities. Should I be diseased, I can command the best medical skill in the land. Should I crave for foreign travel, I have it in my power to visit whatever I like—the strange old mediæval cities of Europe, where the clock of time seems to have been put back for at least a couple of hundred years ; or the weird land of the Pharaohs—with its pyramids and sphinxes, and the green valley of the Nile ; or the

broad flow of historic rivers; or the great battlefields, where the fate of nations has been decided; or that magnificent scenery—never to be forgotten when once seen—where snow-clad mountains stand like a ring of giant sentinels, guarding the spread of the landscape below. Yes; in that money-gift, lies the promise and potency of every enjoyment of which I may wish to partake. And so it is with the Lord Jesus Christ. Having Him—we have all things that we need for the well-being of our souls. We have—what we cannot have apart from Christ—the possession of eternal life—the life with God, and with that life, all its concomitants and manifestations, strength to resist temptation, consolation in trouble, vigour to act, the peace which passeth understanding, the light which shows all things in their proper proportions, the cleansing of the blood, the leading of the Spirit. Jesus is the storehouse, in which is treasured up the fulness of every blessing we stand in need of. Not like a cistern which holds only a certain supply, be it more or less; and which, however useful it may be for a time, is sure to run dry in the end—Christ is an inexhaustible fountain, deeply-seated in the inmost recesses of the soul—a fountain with waters bright, pure, sparkling, health-giving, springing up perennially for the supply of the wants of His believing people.

II.—Such, brethren, briefly, is the value of the gift. We pass now to a much more difficult topic, and one on which it will be well to express ourselves very guardedly, when we advance to our second thought—the cost of the gift to Him who bestows it. Difficult, however, as it is, we must be bold enough to grapple with it. It is a fundamental principle of the Christian religion, brethren, that God,

though One, is not One, in such a sense as to be solitary ; but that He is a Father, and a Father implies a Son. This Son He sent—He gave—or, to use the more striking language of St. Paul, He “spared not”—when the redemption of mankind was to be accomplished. But who is this Son? Let us answer this question. It is conceivable, of course, that, when God intended a spiritual deliverance for mankind, He might—supposing the agency to have been adequate for the purpose—have employed a merely human agent. He has ever dealt with man through men. Prophets, Psalmists, Apostles, inspired preachers—all of them have been His chosen medium of communication with our race. Might He not, then, in the fulness of time, have sent a man of men—a perfect specimen of humanity—to accomplish the wondrous plan? Or, supposing that for some reason or other the human being was found to fall short of the requirements of the enterprise, might not the great Creator have turned to the ranks of the celestial host, and selected from thence an angel, a seraph, or an archangel, to do His bidding, and to go forth as the Teacher, the King, the Priest, the Saviour of mankind? Each of these suppositions has found advocates for itself—some persons maintaining that Jesus Christ is nothing more than an immaculate, a perfect man; others, supposing Him to be a personage higher than man, but inferior to God—an angel, in fact, or archangel, or something of the kind, who was empowered to take our nature upon him, to clothe himself with the garment of our true humanity. But I would ask you to reflect for a moment, that in both these cases, the cost of the gift would be comparatively trifling. “God so loved the world as to give a man,” or, “as to give an

angel for its salvation"—what should we think of such language as this? Would it lead us to form any very high conception of the divine love for us? When Abraham was called upon to sacrifice his son—the son of his love—on Mount Moriah—if he had proposed to substitute for Isaac one of the servants born in his house, or a whole herd of valuable oxen, would the proposal have been accepted? Of course not. The thing demanded, the necessary thing was—that he should consent to part with one who was as dear to him as his own soul; to part with him though he should rend away the very fibres of his heart in doing so.

In this mysterious transaction we have a shadowing forth of the "unspeakable" gift, of which the Apostle speaks in the text. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only begotten of the Father—His own co-equal and co-eternal Son. Of the love with which the Father regarded the Son, we dare not speak. Language would fail us. We can only dimly conceive of it, by what we know of human affection, and of the power which affection exercises over human hearts. And this Son was "sent"—and not only "sent," but "given"—and not only "sent" and "given," but "not spared"—surrendered, parted with, detached from the Giver. The words are the words of Scripture: not mine. And in such words, brethren (as I cannot doubt), we have exhibited to us the whole course of our Lord's connections with the human race. He was "sent" when, as the angel of the covenant, He ate with Abraham in the tent-door; or appeared to Moses in the bush; or, under the walls of Jericho, announced Himself to Joshua as the Captain of the Lord's host; or, in the sight of panic-stricken Manoah, ascended up into heaven in a flame of fire from off the altar. When the incarnation took

place, and the angels flashed out in the midnight-sky, singing their joyous anthem, and the shepherds crowded round the Infant's cradle in the manger-trough of Bethlehem—then He may be said to have been “given.” But the solemn words, “spared not,” must be reserved for those events of His life in which He appeared as the representative of sinners—as bearing, in the presence of God, the whole dreadful load of human iniquity, and as not to be separated from it until, at the consummation of the sacrifice of the Cross, He had put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And it is here, brethren, just here, that there lies the “difficulty” of which I have spoken. Is God impassive? immovable? without feeling? Did it cost Him nothing to smite this righteous man, whose heart ever turned towards Him with the most devoted love and most tender affection? Did it cost Him nothing, to deliver over His only-begotten Son to shame and ill-usage and suffering and death; ay, and Himself to hide the light of His countenance from Him, so that the Sufferer cried out in agony, on the Cross, that He was God-forsaken? Brethren, there must be some meaning in the Apostle's words, “God spared not His own Son.” There must be something corresponding to self-sacrifice in this “gift” of Jesus Christ. But I dare not go further. I feel myself hovering on the brink of a profound mystery, which reverence forbids my attempting to fathom. I ask myself, “How can Deity suffer?” And I find no answer. “And yet,” I ask again, “how can there be a real sacrifice without suffering?” But this I am sure of—that I am intended to understand that the great God made the greatest personal self-sacrifice possible for Him, when He gave His own

Son for me. This I am sure of—that, in the light of that unspeakable act, I am intended to behold the character of God, and to form my estimate of His love. And this practical conclusion I come to—that, if I see things rightly, and I may do so by the teaching of the Spirit—when I thank God for the many mercies of my daily life—for health, and strength and competence, and friends, and comforts, and family blessings, and success in the world, I shall certainly be drawn up to a still higher gratitude than this, and be constrained to echo the language of our text, and cry ; “Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.”



XIX.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF CONSIDERING THE POOR AND NEEDY.

“Blessed is he that considereth the poor and needy: the Lord shall deliver him in the time of trouble.”—PSALM xli. 1.

THERE is a noticeable law of retaliation (so to speak) operating both in our human life, and in the dealings of God with us. Our brother-men treat us very much as we treat them. In their behaviour we may detect, if we choose to see it, the reflection of our own conduct. This is what our Lord means when He says, “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.”

And if this be so, brethren, we may be pretty sure that when we find a man habitually complaining of the niggardliness which he meets with from others, he really is niggardly himself. But the principle is of wider application still. It extends to the divine treatment of us. Our forgiveness, for instance, depends upon our willingness to forgive the wrongs which we have ourselves received. The man of harsh judgments, the severe and censorious man, shall be dealt with according to his own practice. The unloving

man shall receive no love. "He" (says St. James) "shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy." Now, all this rises up in the mind when we hear the opening verses of the Psalm from which my text of this morning has been taken. Just look at them. There are certain persons in the world, for whom the Lord seems to have an especial regard. To them He makes most lavish promises. He will deliver them in trouble, and preserve them in danger, and confer upon them peace and blessedness whilst they are upon earth, and protect them from their enemies—if they have any—and stand by them in sickness, smoothing their pillow, and enabling them to bear patiently the burden of weariness and pain that may be laid upon them. And who are these persons? "They who consider the poor and needy." And again, if this be so, what follows? Why, it follows that there is something at least suspicious about the boast, which we so often hear made, as to not being easily taken in. "I"—(says some one)—"am always on my guard against the attempts which are made upon my pockets. I know mankind, and I am not so easily imposed upon as some people are. Generous—these people think themselves. I call them soft; and I see no reason whatever for imitating their example, and being so over-ready to part with my money." Well, brethren, depend upon it that, out of two men, God greatly prefers the kindly and liberal one. That man's character is more like His own.

However, let us pass on to the subject itself. It is capable of a very natural and easy division—and we will examine first, the considering the poor and needy; and next, the reward that is said to be attached to that act, or rather, that habit.

I.—First, then, it seems to be the teaching, both of the Old and of the New Testament, that there shall always be in existence, in human society, a class of persons who shall not be able to help themselves without receiving a certain measure of help from their fellow-men. In Deuteronomy we read, “the poor shall never cease out of the land.” And the Lord Jesus Christ Himself says, “The poor ye have always with you.” And if such was the case amidst the more favourable circumstances and simpler habits of the people whom God placed in Palestine, and fenced round with a code of peculiar enactments, we can hardly expect it to be otherwise under the conditions of a congested population, and of a civilisation becoming every day more intricate and complex, such as that in which you and I are living now. At the same time, although it is to be expected that there shall always be poverty amongst us—poverty, the result of misfortune; of sickness; of old age; of circumstances which a man is not able to control—we cannot suppose it to be according to the will of God that a society, calling itself Christian, should be disfigured by the apparition within its borders of grinding and demoralising want. When this is found anywhere, there must then be something gravely and flagrantly wrong. Human mismanagement, and human selfishness and greed, lie at the bottom of a state of things in which there shall be the excess of wealth—the extreme of luxury—at one end of the social scale; and at the other end, the almost impossibility of keeping body and soul together.

In old days the chosen people were secured from the results of the accumulation in a few hands, either of vast funds, or of large tracts of the soil—by the institution of the

year of jubilee. It were devoutly to be wished, brethren, that a new system might arise amongst us—and, indeed, amongst all Christian nations—by virtue of which a more even distribution of property should prevail; and with it, the development of a nobler, fuller, freer, human life throughout the length and breadth of the entire community. Differences, of course, there will always be. To demand that the clever and the dull, the brisk and the slow, the energetic and the lazy, the self-denying and the self-indulgent, should remain always on the same level of social position, should secure for themselves always precisely the same amount of this world's goods—would be simply to fly in the face of nature and of common sense. Differences then, I say, there would always be, under any circumstances. But I would fain hope that there need not always be—even before the Millennium—such differences as those which we witness now, and which almost incline us to ask what Christianity has been doing during the nearly two thousand years that it has been present on the earth.

It is, then, at least conceivable that the class of the poor, of those who cannot well get on through life, unless they are subsidised by their more fortunate neighbours—may be found capable of perceptible diminution, although we can never anticipate—constituted as the world is—their absolute and entire disappearance. Here they are! Here they will be! certainly, in your time and mine. And the question is, “What is our duty towards them?” To this question the sacred writer gives reply—to “consider” them. Let us spend a few minutes in the endeavour to understand the meaning of his language.

“Consider the poor.” In one sense, of course, the priest

and the Levite—in the well-known narrative—the two men who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and passed by what seemed to be a dying man on their way—in one sense, they did “consider” the poor. They looked at him; and one of them went and looked at him: but that was all. They averted their eyes as soon as possible from the distressing spectacle: it was really—they reasoned—no concern of theirs: let the police see to it. No doubt it was the traveller’s own fault that he had got into trouble; possibly he was a man of low character, and had been quarrelling with equally low companions, and so come to grief. Anyhow, they saw no reason why they should be bothered, and perhaps endangered, by meddling with other people’s affairs. Now, is it unfair to say, that the priest and the Levite have their lineal successors in the world in the present day? Are not we like them, if we hold aloof from the whole subject—just glancing superciliously at it for a moment, and urging, in excuse for our indifference, that the poor have brought their troubles upon themselves, by their drink, and their dirt, and their laziness, and their insubordination, and such like things; and that really it is the business of the legislature, or of the clergy, or of the professed philanthropists, or of somebody else to attend to them. We think it is unquestionably not ours to take up such disagreeable and unsavoury matters. “Am I my brother’s keeper?” we cry. “Certainly not! Let my brother—if he be my brother—look after himself; or let somebody who chooses to do it look after him.”

“Consider the poor.” In one sense, and in a far better sense than that just described, we do this thing if we give our money, our silver, our gold—or, it may be, our bank-

notes—for the relief of the distress which is rising everywhere, like a seething black tide, about us. But the giving of money, important as it is, is not enough, if it stand alone—provided, of course, that it is in our power to give something more than money. It hardly amounts to the “considering” of which the Psalmist speaks. In that very practical epistle—the Epistle of St. James—a portrait is drawn of the religion, that is the “worship,” which is acceptable to God—which is “pure and undefiled before God and the Father;” and in the portrait I find that the most prominent feature is the visiting the fatherless and the widow in their affliction. “Visiting,” mark the word. According to St. James, we are not to shrink from bringing ourselves into personal contact with human distress and sorrow, if it is possible for us to do so. It is not money alone that is wanted in such cases, but with money, the kindly inquiry, the sympathy, the tenderness, the recognition of a common humanity, and in many cases, of brotherhood in Jesus Christ, the tones of the voice, the glance of the eye, the grasp of the hand, the word of loving consolation—all this—which does so much in the way of assuaging the smart of affliction and lightening its load. It is not right, brethren, for us to say—“There! take my cash—as much as you please! But for heaven’s sake don’t let me see the miserable objects you are going to relieve. I cannot stand such things.” That is not like our Master Jesus Christ. “Like Him!” It is most painfully and distressingly unlike Him.

Once again, brethren, I would exclude from the Psalmist’s meaning the fantastic and sentimental charity which finds excitement—and almost a species of fashionable dissipation—in visiting the poor. There is such a thing—as you are

probably aware. But it is good for little, if good for any thing at all : for it is lacking in the depth and solidity of Christian principle. Nor would I consent to admit the impulsive charity, which cannot do anything except by fits and starts ; which can only rouse itself when the humour takes it, or when it is moved by some sensational appeal ; or when it is touched by some eloquent discourse ; or when it is goaded on by the example of others round it. This, too, is hardly what the sacred writer calls "consideration" of the poor. It is a weak, feeble, flimsy, tawdry, ephemeral sort of thing, and has none of that steady perseverance which characterises all true Christian feeling, and all real Christian action.

But now, brethren, what is it to "consider the poor?" In endeavouring to answer the question, I should like to begin at the beginning—a most important thing to do in matters of religion. And I would say this then, that, to "consider" your poor neighbours is—first of all, to see him "in Christ ;" by which I mean, to recognise his relation to Christ, and therefore to yourself. Charity, placed on any less important basis than this, is placed—you may be sure—on no very stable and trustworthy foundation. "But," (some one objects) "but the man whom I propose to relieve is not in any sense a Christian—not a disciple—not, whatever you like to call it—in fact, he does not even profess to be animated by religious sentiments of any kind whatever." Possibly not ! but that has nothing to do with the matter—except so far as that the absence of religious principle on his part will make you more cautious in dealing with the subject of your intended benevolence. The man is, at least, your brother-man. He shares with you in the posses-

sion of common humanity—that mysterious and awful endowment. More than this—he is one for whom Christ died ; one over whom Christ watches from His throne on high ; one for whose salvation that exalted Christ longs and yearns. Do you doubt it ? I am sure you do not. That man then, whatever he may be, however lost and degraded now—is to be regarded by you with respect, if only on account of the infinite possibilities which are lurking in his manhood ; and which you, perhaps, may be the means—God helping you—of calling out into active exercise. Let us begin then, here ; and what will the result be ? Why, that starting right, we shall be more likely to move in a right direction—more likely to do what is pleasing to God and beneficial to our neighbours. We shall “consider” the man—“consider” him—by thinking him worth all the pains that we can possibly expend upon him—not only in the way of relieving his necessities, but also by relieving him after such a fashion as to elevate and not to degrade him. We shall “consider” him by administering our charity thoughtfully and wisely—by having the courage to refuse him money when we know that the money will harm him, and although we know that the man, in his ignorance, will certainly abuse us behind our backs for withholding from him what he asks for. God withholds, brethren. And we must learn to withhold, when it is right to do so. God withholds from His children ; but, as the hymn says, “’Tis mercy still that grants it, or denies.” “But all this,” you say, “will cost me a deal of trouble.” Of course it will. But what of that ? Do you think that God is going to pronounce you “blessed,” because you give a penny now and then in the streets to a beggar ; or even because you drop a

shilling, or (for the matter of that), a sovereign into the plate every time a collection is made in the church? It is not likely. To "consider" the poor is no such easy thing. But for all that, it is a duty to which we Christian people are called. You and I, brethren, have many, very many, blessings—money, influence, education, intelligence, the capacity of sympathising, social position. What are these things given us for? Well, for our own enjoyment, if you like; or rather, I ought to say, "For our own enjoyment, certainly. God is good and kind to us. But more than this, brethren; in order that we should use these things for the purpose of promoting God's glory—by promoting the true and substantial well-being of our fellow-men."

There is one word in this part of our subject which I have not touched upon: the word "needy." I need only say about it, that, whilst there are those who seem to require constantly-repeated assistance, there are others who want no more than that we should be ready to come forward to help them at a pinch. These are the "needy." To these—as well as to the "poor"—we owe the duty of "considering" their case. And if we ever have it in our power, by wise and well-timed intervention, to help a man in his early struggles; to hold him up when just on the point of falling; to remove for him an obstacle which he cannot himself surmount—but the removal of which will leave him, in all probability, a smooth path for the future—we should rejoice that the opportunity is presented to us, and thankfully embrace it.

II.—So much then, Christian brethren, for the first and most important part of our text. Let me turn to a very brief discussion (it requires no more) of the second—the

reward promised to those persons who are thus in the habit of "considering" the poor and needy.

Part of the reward, of course, is to be found in the exquisite pleasure which always attaches to the exercise of benevolence. He who made the greatest sacrifice for humanity, has told us that "it is more blessed to give than to receive;" and perhaps it would be difficult to imagine a happier life than that of the man whose days are largely spent in the imitation of the Divine Master, who "went about doing good." But, it is not to this particular aspect of the reward that the Psalmist directs our attention. Rather, he points to the fact that the Lord hath promised to deliver the benevolent man in the time of trouble. Not—as you will observe—"out" of trouble, but "in the time of trouble." Religion, as we very well know, confers no charter of exemption from affliction. Serve the Lord as faithfully as you will—the common lot of humanity will befall you all the same; either sickness will prostrate you upon the bed of weariness and pain; or bereavement will leave you bare and desolate; or riches will take to themselves wings and flee away; or friends will desert you; or your hopes will be disappointed, and your plans frustrated; or advancing old age will cripple and enfeeble your frame; or, at least and at last, death will certainly come, as it comes to others—and with rude, rough grasp, will pluck you from the bright enjoyments and comforts amidst which you find yourself by long habituation so much at home.

We cannot, then, expect to escape trouble. We must, all of us, at some time or other—sooner or later—be "in it." True, brethren; but there are two ways of being "in" trouble. There is *the being in it alone*—I mean without

Christ; and there is the being in it with Christ. And if Christ is with us at such a time, He will "deliver" us: that is to say, He will not suffer the pressure put upon us to break us down: He will transmute our trial into a heavenly and spiritual discipline. He will cause our consolations to abound: in fact, He will touch and tinge the dark clouds of sorrow with the radiance of His love, and make the sombre portals of grief a door of admission into the depths of the brightness of His own eternal presence. Such, brethren, is to be the reward of him who considereth the poor and needy.

That man—as I said before—seems to be emphatically a man after God's own heart. Christ at all events, recognises as His own those who are like Him. In that remarkable description of the Day of Judgment—which occurs at the close of the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew—we find that the decision turns (upon character, of course)—but upon character manifested in the treatment of the "poor and needy." And those who are bidden inherit the kingdom—are the men and women who have fed the hungry, and tended the sick, and welcomed the stranger, and comforted the prisoner in the gloom of his dungeon. In fact, they are accepted by Christ, and stand on His right hand—*because they resemble Him*. Like draws to like. "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

XX.

THOMAS DIDYMUS.

“Jesus saith unto Him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”—JOHN xx. 29.

IF you run your eye down the list of the Apostles of Christ, you will be struck with the variety of character and capability that is to be found amongst them. There is, first of all, Peter, the rock-Apostle—the bold and resolute confessor of Christ, the ready speaker; then there is the silent and thoughtful John—the friend of Jesus—in whose soul the image of his divine Master was more distinctly reflected than in any other of the twelve; then James, who shared with his brother the title of “Boanerges,” on account of his vehement and fervid disposition; then the retiring Andrew; then the business-like Matthew—the methodical recorder of the life of Jesus; and others (I must not weary you by enumerating them, and describing them all). But perhaps one of the most interesting figures in the whole group—interesting on account of its very marked individuality—is that of the Apostle, Thomas Didymus, Thomas the twin, whose name is brought so prominently before us in the services of to-day. To this man—to his character, and to his acts, as they are revealed to us in Holy

Scripture—I wish to be permitted now to direct your attention. The subject will command the best and most earnest consideration which we can possibly give to it.

I.—Now, all that we know for certain about St. Thomas' inner life is derived from the pages of the fourth Gospel. There he is spoken of three times, on three several occasions; and although the words are few, and there is no deliberate attempt at character-painting, the man is put before us with a distinctness and a precision which renders him to us almost like a familiar and intimate acquaintance. On the first occasion, our Lord has been intimating to His disciples His intention of returning to Judæa, for the purpose of paying a visit to the family at Bethany. Lazarus—one of the family—was dead, as you will remember; and a visit of sympathy and consolation might seem natural and proper enough, under the circumstances, had it not been that, only a short time before, the Jews at Jerusalem had made an attack upon Jesus, for the purpose of taking His life, and there was only too much reason to fear that the attack would be repeated if Jesus appeared within the walls of the city, or in its neighbourhood again. The disciples, then, were aghast at the idea of re-entering Judæa—at least until sufficient time had elapsed to allow for the subsidence of the popular feeling against Jesus, and they ventured to expostulate, both on their Master's account and their own. To go to Jerusalem at such a time was simply, they hinted, endangering the lives of all. When, however, they found that the Lord's resolution was fixed, they withdrew their opposition, and said no more. But Thomas spoke out—not, I mean, to Jesus, but to his fellow-disciples. Taking

the place usually occupied by St. Peter—that of the mouth piece of the whole body—he urged that they should make up their minds (for, perhaps, some were hesitating) to accompany their Master at any risk. It was as if he said : “ We are going to our death, of course, both the Lord and we. There is no prospect of our escaping the vengeance of our excited enemies. Nevertheless, let us go, and share our Master’s fate. Life without Him will not be worth the living. And if He is determined to perish, let us be determined to perish also.” His exact words were these : “ Let us also go, that we may die with Him.” Now, brethren, we have here the language of a man of a somewhat gloomy temperament, who is inclined to look on the darker side of human affairs ; to discern obstacles and dangers in every path ; to believe that important enterprises are sure to turn out badly ; but who, at the same time, is so filled with a deep and devoted attachment to the Lord Jesus Christ, that He is quite willing to share His fate, and to be associated with Him in death, as he has been associated with Him in life. Such, then, so far, was the Apostle Thomas.

On the next occasion, we find ourselves in the rough, bare chamber in Jerusalem, in which the last supper has just been celebrated. Judas has withdrawn on his traitorous errand ; and Jesus, relieved from that dark presence, and finding Himself surrounded by only faithful and true hearts, is entering freely upon that long and most important discourse which He delivered to his disciples. He has just announced to them His approaching departure. It is only a little while longer, He says, that He will be with them, and then He will return to the Father. He will go

hence, and be no more seen by their bodily eyes. But though not seen, He will still be watching over them ; He will still be engaged in providing for their truest and highest well-being ; He will be preparing a place for them. And when the time has arrived, He will return (in some cases, we suppose, by His messenger, Death ; in others, by the summons of the great Day of Resurrection), and receive His people unto Himself—no more to be separated from Him—that where He is, there they may be also. And then He adds, as if in full assurance that His meaning was perfectly understood by all who were listening to Him, “Whither I go ye know ; and the way ye know.” At this point Thomas interposes. He has not understood the Saviour’s meaning, and he does not hesitate to say so. Now, in acting thus, Thomas must not be supposed to be wanting in respect for his Divine Master. He is profoundly respectful—but the fact is, first, that he does wish to understand the words that have been spoken ; and, in the second place, that he does not wish it to be thought that he understands, when he really does not. A man of less resolute straightforwardness and honesty would have probably let the matter pass without comment. Not so Thomas. He cannot allow his intelligence to be taken for granted. He will not be supposed to be farther on the road than he has actually travelled. And so he breaks in with the words (and the words reveal another feature of the man’s character—his simple honesty), “Lord, we know not whither Thou goest ; and how can we know the way ?”

We come now, brethren, to the third and last occasion, and it is, of course, the most important of all. The crucifixion has taken place, and Thomas has seen the Lord

Jesus hanging dead upon the cross, His hands and feet pierced with the nails, and his side transfixed by the broad spear-head of the Roman soldier. Not so long ago—when the journey to Bethany was being discussed—the Apostle had been able to contemplate with tolerable equanimity the dying of his Master. “Let us also go, that we may die with Him.” But such a death as this—with its terrible accompaniments of rejection by the Jewish people, and of insult and ignominy inflicted by the coarse soldiery, to whose tender mercies He had been handed over—such a death had probably never entered into Thomas’ thoughts ; and the occurrence of it obviously deprived him of all heart, all trust, all hope. “This is an end,” he would say, “of the day-dreams I once cherished about the restoration of Israel, and the emancipation of the sin-stricken race of man. All is over. I regarded Jesus as the promised Deliverer, but clearly I was self-deceived about Him. And now there remains for me nothing but the blackness of the darkness of absolute despair.”

These thoughts, brethren, were quite in keeping with the despondent character of the Apostle—quite in keeping with what we may perhaps call his pessimistic bias ; and in judging of them, it is only fair to take the constitutional tendencies of the man into our account. But it is clear that he acted unwisely in allowing the thoughts to obtain so great an ascendancy over him, as obviously came to be the case. His best plan would have been to have mixed with the other disciples. They, too, were terribly staggered and depressed by what had occurred ; but, for all that, association with them, united prayer with them, the interchange of ideas with them, the influence of the more hopeful

amongst them, would have done something—and might have done much—to lighten the pressure of the burden which he felt to be laid upon his spirit. This, however, as it appears, was precisely the plan which the Apostle did not see fit to adopt. He wandered away from his companions up the hillsides of Olivet and the solitude of the neighbouring downs, and perhaps even further a field, and walked about disconsolate and moody and alone, brooding over his sad thoughts, and bringing himself every moment nearer to the perilous border of downright unbelief. It was in consequence of this mistake of his that Thomas missed the first visit of the risen Lord to His assembled disciples, and missed with it the strange, deep “gladness” that fell upon the little company when they “saw the Lord.” In the course of the week he seems to have come to Jerusalem, and fallen in with the disciples. They, of course—for they were full of the subject of the Resurrection, and expected him to participate in their gladness—ran up eagerly to him to announce that they had seen the Lord. But, to their surprise and dismay, the announcement was coldly welcomed by their moody companion. The information, he said, was incredible. It could not be true that Jesus was alive, for he himself had gazed upon Him in death, and watched the drooping head, the fallen jaw, the glazed eye, the gaping wound made in His side. All the marks of death were there. Could he now be risen from the dead? It was out of the question. And when they urged that they were ten in number—old and trusted friends of his—who had no conceivable reason for deceiving him, and certainly no wish to do so; and that they (these ten) had all of them seen the Lord—seen the wounds in

His hands and side ; that He had appeared amongst them and spoken to them for some time, and even breathed upon them—giving them a commission from heaven ; his reply was, as we may suppose, “I know that you would not willingly deceive me, but the fact is that you are yourselves deceived : you have taken some phantom, some image, some vision, some appearance—I know not what—for the Lord Himself, and have jumped to conclusions.” And when again they urged him to consider that it was not at all likely that ten of them, and they too, men in their sober senses, should have been mistaken in such a matter—he seems to have been a little irritated, and to have retorted in some such terms as these : “Well, I am not one to believe on mere testimony. I want surer and more trustworthy evidence. Let me see as you have seen, let me hear as you have heard, let me handle as you have handled—then I will yield my assent, but not till then.” “Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe.” “I will not believe !”

The words, brethren have a painful sound. Obviously the good Apostle is none the better for his solitary walks and his melancholy broodings ; and something like the obstinacy, the pride, the contempt of others, the exaltation of self—which are characteristic of infidelity—is approaching the frontier of his soul, if as yet it has not succeeded in making good its footing within the region itself. And now a few more days pass away. Possibly, the Apostle may have been softened by the intercourse with his brethren which he had resumed, and had become more disposed than he was at

first to believe them to be in the right and himself in the wrong. I do not know. But, at any rate, when the eighth day had come, and the disciples were gathered together again—and again the door was shut—Thomas was with them. Suddenly, as before, the Saviour appears. He addresses Himself to Thomas. Almost quoting the words which the Apostle had used, He offers to give him the evidence he has demanded; but, at the same time significantly warns him that he is on perilous ground; that he is standing in hesitation at the parting of two ways—the one of which leads to belief, the other to unbelief. “Become not faithless: thou art in danger of becoming such; but become believing, whilst it is in thy power to do so.” Here, however, the Apostle’s opposition breaks down. His doubts vanish away. The sight of his Divine Master, the sound of His voice, the tenderness of His look, and combined with this, His obviously omniscient acquaintance with what had taken place in that room eight days before—all conspire to open the way for such a revelation of Christ as had hardly yet been granted to any of the disciples, and Thomas bursts out with the shamed yet rapturous exclamation: “It is, then—it is—my Lord and my God!” And with this noble confession of Christ—a nobler one than even that to which Peter had given utterance in the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi—the fourth Gospel, as it stood at first, comes to a close.

From the narrative thus discussed we will gather rapidly and briefly a few simple inferences, and then we shall have done.

II.—In the first place, then, let us consider the evidential advantage which accrues from the narrative to the cause

of Christianity. Years ago it was urged by the opponents of the faith that the early Christian disciples maintained the resurrection of Christ as a fact, when they knew it to be a fiction; that they went to bonds or to death, to the dungeon, to the scaffold, to the stake, and from thence to appearance in the presence of God, with a conscious lie in their right hand. There is no credulity, brethren, in the whole world, like the credulity of scepticism; and for a considerable time this absurd theory actually found credence, but at last it was thrown aside. I do not think we ever hear of it now. Another, however, has taken its place. It is represented that the disciples—the Apostles particularly—were expecting their Master's resurrection, and that consequently, when one of the Christian women (who was presumably hysterical) came to tell them that she had seen something in the dusk of the early morning which she believed to be Jesus, they caught eagerly at the announcement, and, one encouraging the other, persuaded themselves by degrees of the absolute truth of the resurrection of their Master.

But if there is any one thing which the Gospel narrative makes plain, it is this—that not only Thomas, but that every man and woman amongst the disciples did *not* expect their Master to rise again from the dead, and had to be convinced of the fact of His rising by repeated applications of most incontrovertible evidence.

In the next place, let us notice that there is no slight amount of peril in matters of religion in demanding more evidence than can actually be given. Men formerly used to say, "Write the Gospel—the divine message—in letters of fire along the sky, and I will believe." They say now,

“Give me mathematical demonstration—make the whole thing as plain as a problem in geometry—and then it will be impossible for me to withhold my assent.” But this has to be considered, brethren, that you and I—who are creatures—have hardly the right to require the Creator to give us the amount of evidence which we think fit to ask for. What He will do in this way, is surely for Him and not for us to settle. And if He should give, as He does, sufficient evidence to make unbelief inexcusable—sufficient evidence to enable us to believe, if we are not determined to Ldisbelieve—I do not see what we have to complain of.
→ And as to mathematical demonstration, the subject, in the nature of things, is not capable of it. Were it a matter for the head alone it would be different; but the heart is concerned in the matter. You have the two factors—the head and the heart—to deal with; and in the case of religion, there is no possibility of, so binding the heart down, by any conceivable process whatever that it should not Lbe capable of resistance if it chooses to resist.

And lastly, though there is no blessedness (so far as I can see) in superstitious credulity—for God who gave us our reason obviously intended us to exercise it—yet there is a blessedness in accepting divine truth on the terms on which God sees fit to propose it to our minds. The Lord Himself, as you will remember, did not appeal in the first instance to His own miracles. Miracles were His second weapon, to be used when the first had failed. Miracles were for the purpose of beating down the difficulties of men who were hard of belief, or dull in spiritual apprehension. He Himself, is His own great evidence. Like the sun in the sky, He declares by His shining who

He is to all who have the sense to see. And the reason of the superior blessedness is not far to seek. It is a thing to be thankful for, brethren, to have such simplicity of purpose, such sympathy with goodness, such desire after the truth, such longing for spiritual attainment, as shall bring you into harmony with the mind of Jesus, and make it a comparatively easy thing for you to recognise Him when He makes Himself known to you by the testimony of others. And this, I think, is what Jesus meant when He said : "Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed : blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."



XXI.

THE TE DEUM.

“Make them to be numbered with thy saints : in glory everlasting.”

THE magnificent hymn to which these words belong, and which we know by the name of the “Te Deum,” has sometimes been called the “canticle of St. Ambrose and St. Augustine”—there being a legend to the effect that on the occasion of the baptism of the latter by the former saint, the two men were inspired to give utterance suddenly and extemporaneously (each answering the other) to the verses with which we are so familiar. There is, however, no solid foundation for the legend. In all probability the canticle, in its present form, is a production of the fourth or fifth centuries ; and it represents a still more ancient composition, of which traces are to be found in documents belonging to a very early date in the history of the Christian Church. One thing, however, is certain, brethren (and it may interest you to know it), that the “Te Deum” is found in our own morning service as far back as the time of the Norman Conquest. And there it has stood ever since. Of this well-known hymn I have ventured to make use for my own purposes. Yesterday—the first of November—the Church observed one of her most striking festivals—that of All Saints. The prayer I have just offered,

is the collect appointed for the day. And as it seemed well that the subject of the festival should not pass by altogether without notice, I have selected a verse from the "Te Deum," as a starting-point of my present discourse.

I.—The Te Deum opens, as you know, with an outburst of praise. First, the earth is represented as bowing itself down, in lowly adoration, before the footstool of the eternal throne. From the earth the strain rises up to heaven; and we hear the anthems of the angels—the cherubim and seraphim—of all the unknown and unnamed celestial powers; and thus the earth below and the heaven above are united together in the one glorious occupation. Presently the vast host of the blessed dead break into the song, and chief amongst them—the Apostles, who went forth at the Saviour's bidding to be the earliest heralds and preachers of His Gospel; the Prophets, who, in various ages and under widely differing circumstances, proclaimed the will of God to their fellow-men; the Martyrs, clothed in shining raiment, who—in dungeons, or on scaffolds, or at the fiery stake—bore witness to the truth of God, and sealed their testimony with their blood; but ere the sound of their triumphant cry has died away into silence, there is heard blending with it the voice of the Universal Church—the great body of living believers—in every part of the habitable globe. And what is the theme of their united praise? It is the glory of the eternal Trinity; the greatness of the Triune God—of the Father, infinite in majesty; of the Son, the only begotten, and equal in honour with the Father; of the Holy Ghost, the gracious and loving Comforter of the feeble and suffering children of men.

At this point, brethren, there is, as it were, a slight and

transient pause ; and when the voices rise again, it is to hymn the praise of Jesus Christ, the everlasting Son of the Father. Then there pass before us, in rapid succession, the profound mystery of the Incarnation—the bitterness and sharpness of the struggle, which culminated in the death of the cross ; the grandeur of the resurrection, by which the bars of the grave were broken, and the gates of the kingdom of heaven were thrown open to all who will enter by faith ; the ascending into the presence of the Father, and the session at his right hand in glory. Then, as you will have observed, a slower and more solemn tone begins to mingle with the strain, as the vision of the approaching judgment presents itself to the minds of the worshippers. Amidst all the joy and exultation they cannot but remember that Jesus Christ—this Saviour, this Deliverer, this God-man, this Friend—is coming again to be their Judge. It is no trifle, brethren—even for the believer—this throne of judgment. And the best of us may well tremble, even whilst rejoicing, at the thought of standing before the blaze of an unerring tribunal, where the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, and where our characters—with all their imperfection and mixture of motives—shall be laid so completely open, that angels and men shall know us—not as we appear—but as we really are. In the hymn the thought obviously sweeps like a drift of dark cloud across a bright and sunny landscape. And the singers lift up an earnest cry—a cry of entreaty—that the Saviour, who is also to be the Judge, will be graciously pleased to extend present help to His servants, so that when the dread time of trial comes they may be found not to be excluded from the blessed throng, but numbered with the saints in glory everlasting.

Such is (so to speak) the history of our verse, the connection in which it stands. We will now consider one or two simple but important thoughts which it seems to suggest.

II.—It suggests—in the first place—a desire—perhaps we might say, a longing—for association with a certain class of persons, who are entitled the “saints.” Now, the essence of saint-hood consists in consecration to God. Saintliness is something more than freedom from vice; more than regularity of behaviour; more than fulfilment of religious duty; more than kindness and benevolence. It is a spiritual condition, in which the personal God is the supreme object of the affections; in which we can say with the Psalmist, “My soul is athirst for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?” and it necessarily implies that the dominant tendency, the foremost endeavour of the life, is to yield a perfect and unhesitating obedience to the divine will and commandments. In this sense, of course, the holy angels are “saints.” In this sense the apostles and prophets and martyrs—and indeed, the whole company of the blessed dead—are “saints.” They all of them have a character so closely resembling the Divine Being Himself, that they are at home in His presence, and would be unhappy if they were by any means excluded from it. If then we use the words of the verse with anything like an intelligent appreciation of their meaning, we intend it to be inferred that we are in sympathy with these “saints,” and that this sympathy leads us to desire to be numbered with them now, and to be numbered with them hereafter.

It is not so much, brethren, that we are anxious to be

delivered from the punishment of our sins, and the agony that falls upon lost souls. Nor is it that we seek to be free (as we shall be in heaven) from the wearinesses and burdens, from the apprehensions and cares, from the sufferings and troubles and bereavements and deaths, and the thousand causes of sorrow which lie in our path in the present state of existence. Nor, again, is it so much that our imaginations are fired with the vision of the magnificence and splendour of the heavenly inheritance—pictured to us, as it is, in the wonderful pages of the Apocalypse—although all these things may and do contribute their share to the incitement of our desire. It is rather that, feeling ourselves to be one in heart and spirit with that bright multitude before the throne, feeling that we belong to them, feeling that we should be at home with them—we look forward with eagerness of anticipation to the time when the barriers shall be thrown down, and the perfect communion shall begin, because we shall have passed from the struggles of the Church militant here below, to the calm and repose of the Church triumphant above. We sometimes sing these lines (you will recognise them at once) :—

“O ! my spirit longs and faints
For the converse of Thy saints,
For the brightness of Thy face,
For Thy fulness, God of grace !”

Is that sentiment a false and unreal one? a mere tinkle of musical phraseology? Surely not, brethren. Surely it has a meaning for us, at least when we are in our better and higher moods. I know you will understand me. You and I are in no hurry to be gone from the post in life which we now occupy. We wait the Lord's time. We wait till we

see the wave of the beckoning hand which bids us come. Meanwhile, we are thankful for the many blessings of existence, and thankful too to be permitted to serve God and our fellow-man (if it be in ever so humble a way) in such a nation, and in such a Christian community as ours, and in such remarkable and stirring times as those in which our lot has been cast. But, although thankful, we are not satisfied. The fact of being born again of the Spirit has engendered in us a certain divine discontent. Belonging to the family of God, we cannot tolerate being severed from it. Our home is not here. Citizens of a heavenly city—we cannot rest until we join the pure and holy and noble and kind of every age and race and clime—the aggregated goodness of earth—with Christ and the holy angels; and so our cry is, “Make us, O Christ, to be numbered with Thy saints.”

The passage suggests, in the second place, that there seems to us to be a possibility of our being excluded from this heavenly companionship; and that the thought of the possibility drives us to the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ, in earnest prayer and supplication. But what makes us think such exclusion possible? Well, partly our knowledge of our own hearts, and partly our knowledge of the world at large. Every day, brethren, there sails from the shore a fleet of beautifully constructed and well-equipped vessels. These are human lives. God fashioned them. God furnished them out. God meant them to reach the distant harbour in safety and honour. But do they? Let us see. Amidst the good wishes and the prayers of friends and relatives the start is made; the vessels spread their white wings to the breeze, and speed on their way. For awhile all is well; but

in some cases only for awhile. Transport yourselves, brethren, in imagination to the opposite coast, and watch these vessels, that started together under such favourable conditions—coming in. Some there are who have made a successful journey, though not without encountering many perils, and they enter joyfully. Others come in less triumphantly, but safe. And some again stagger in like a man that has been wounded almost to death—cordage rent, masts broken, deck shattered, sails torn, provisions exhausted, each of them only not a wreck. But the others—the many others—where are they? Why, one split upon a sunken rock that might have been easily avoided had the chart been consulted. Another heeded not the warning lights, and was wrecked on a sand-bank. A third kept no watch, and fell into the hands of pirates. Some were set on fire by carelessness. A secret leak—a mere trifle at first—was the ruin of hundreds. But why go through the melancholy recital? Many of you know that the picture is not at all overdrawn. Indeed, one of the saddest occupations of advancing years is to look round you and see the wrecks of broken lives and blasted reputations that lie about on every side, and to remember what you once knew about them, and how good and promising their earlier chances and prospects were.

That is what I have called our “knowledge of the world.” And next, there is “our knowledge of our own hearts.” “Who am I?” we say to ourselves, that I should stand where so many have fallen? I may be tempted, and succumb to the temptation. I cannot tell. Or, some insidious habit may gradually wind its deadly meshes round me, and hold me in hopeless bondage. I cannot tell. Or, I may drift away, little by little, from the

spiritual position I once occupied. The world may creep into my heart, and I may lose my relish for prayer, my interest in the Bible, my care for the house of God ; and whilst retaining some of the outward appearance of religion, I may become only the husk and shell of what I was—destitute altogether of the inner spiritual life. I cannot tell.” Brethren, considerations like these (and they are by no means unreasonable) drive a man—who is conscious of his own weakness and of the power of the world upon him—to utter the petition, “We therefore pray Thee, help Thy servants : whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious blood.”

In the third place, we may briefly consider the petition itself. It is perfectly Scriptural. The Psalms abound—as you will remember—with entreaties for “help.” And it is not to be supposed that the help asked for is of that partial kind which simply supplements our deficiencies, but rather that amount and quality of help which the omnipotent Saviour alone is able to supply. Or, to speak more plainly, the Christian disciple, in his conflict and struggle with evil, does not make an effort himself, and having done so, implore Christ to step in and do the rest (so that success, when it comes, is the result of the joint action of the two) ; but it is that when pressed with temptation, the disciple abandons all hope of self-help ; and, hastening to Christ, simply puts himself into His hands, leaving it to Him to save and deliver him. For Christ saves wholly—saves all by Himself—or not at all. And again, brethren, the plea put forward is Scriptural too : “Save Thy servants, whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious blood.” It corresponds precisely with the supplication in the Psalms, “I am Thine : save me !” And see what it amounts to. It is a pleading with Christ—

on the ground of what He has done and suffered for us—that He will not leave His great work unfinished, and if we may so say, futile and nugatory. And such a plea, brethren, we may be sure, is sure to prevail. Jesus died for us the bitter death of the cross ; He gave His life a ransom for the many. That is our conviction—distinctly expressed in the words of the text. And in the fact of that death, Jesus has given us the fullest, the strongest, the most emphatic, the most incontrovertible assurance of His favour and goodwill towards us. On that favour and goodwill we lay hold. He means us to do so. Nay, I would rather say—He commands us to do so. He would not have us, under any conceivable circumstances, question His love. We may have fallen into gross transgressions and vicious indulgences ; or wandered far away from the path, left our first love, and hardened our hearts from the divine fear ; still, Christ has redeemed us with His blood. And now He would have us lay hold of that belief, in order that we may be plucked up out of the horrible pit and miry clay, and have our feet set upon the rock, and be safe from the power of evil. And so, in obedience to His command, pressed in upon our hearts by the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit—we claim our redeemed position. Come forth, O Jesus ! to the help of those for whom Thou hast died ; for without Thy help we shall utterly perish. Let not Thy work for us be in vain. Leave it not unfinished. We plead Thy love shown on the Cross of Calvary. Oh ! that it may show itself now. “ By Thine agony and bloody sweat ; by Thy cross and passion ; by Thy precious death and burial ; by Thy glorious resurrection and ascension ; and by the coming of the Holy Ghost, good Lord, deliver us.”

Just one more topic remains. We ask for admission into glory, and that glory, an everlasting one. Now, what do we mean by "glory?" Well, brethren, what do we mean by the "glory of God?" Not His environment, wonderful as that is; but the manifestation of His character. God is not intellect, though His understanding is unsearchable, and His wisdom past finding out. Nor is He power, though He is Almighty, and ordereth all things after the counsel of His own will. Nor is He splendour, though He dwelleth in the light that is unapproachable; and though angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, bow down before the footstool of His throne. But God is love; and every outcome of His love is an outbreak of His glory. So—I think I may say this—so with the people of God. There may be—nay, there must be—something external conferred upon them, a beauty and a brightness like those of Christ Himself, endowments far transcending the grasp of our present thought—all, in fact, that is meant by the crowns and thrones of which the Scripture speaks. But the glory—the central glory—will assuredly be the outshining of that eternal life, which Christ has bestowed upon His believing people, and of which they even now partake, by virtue of their living identity with Him.

And this glory of the spiritual life is everlasting. It is not a thing that we shall possess for a season, and then lose. It is not liable to the vicissitudes of our human infirmity. It lies beyond the reach of temptation. No enemy can touch it. No storms can assail it; for it is hid with Christ in God, and it is eternal with the eternity of the Saviour Himself. "Make us to be numbered with Thy saints: in glory everlasting."

XXII.

CHRIST JESUS—THE APOSTLE AND HIGH PRIEST.

“Wherefore, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession—Christ Jesus.”—HEBREWS iii. 1 (part).

THE words “Apostle and High Priest” may be said to contain, in a very compressed form, the sum and substance of the two preceding chapters. If you will glance at those chapters, you will find that the object of the writer has been to convince the Hebrew Christians of the immense superiority of the spiritual position which they occupy, over that which they have been induced to abandon. They have quitted the shadow, he says, and come over to the substance. All that they once possessed in type and symbol, they possess at the present moment in reality and truth.

They have had prophets and teachers ; now they have the great Prophet and Teacher—the Incarnate Son of God. They have had a succession of high priests ; now they have the great High Priest Himself. In fact, the system, to which they once belonged, was merely educational and preparatory ; and it has served its purpose for them, and done its work—seeing that, through its means, they have emerged into the glorious liberty of the children of God. How ad-

mirably adapted such a line of thought was to the necessities of the Hebrew Christians—tempted as they were in a variety of ways to return to Judaism—I am sure, brethren, you will be able to imagine, without my attempting to help you. And indeed I wish, without further preface, to detach my text from the course of the writer's argument, and to discuss it alone. So taken, it will yield the material of profitable and (I hope) of interesting meditation. It will suggest two topics, which we will examine in succession. First, the titles here given to the Lord Jesus Christ; and, secondly, the importance of "considering" Him, and the practical effect of our doing so.

I.—First, then, the titles, "Apostle and High Priest." What you and I require, brethren, partly on account of the distance which must of necessity exist between the Creator and the created—between the infinite and the finite, but more perhaps because of that change of relation between ourselves and God, which sin has introduced—what we require is, first, some one who shall come from God to us, with full and trustworthy information on the subject of the divine character and will; and then some one who shall go back from us to God, and represent us and our interests before Him. Both these needs are met for us in Jesus Christ. In the times before our own—I mean, in the days of those whom the writer of the epistle calls "our fathers"—God did not fail to hold converse with mankind, and more especially with those whom He more especially regarded as His peculiar people. He sent the "prophets"—men raised up from time to time, and qualified by a supernatural influence called "inspiration" to declare and interpret Him to their fellow-men. The prophet was God's

mouthpiece—God's medium of communication ; or, to use the Scriptural expression, God spake in the prophet, and through him. The prophetic commission, as you know, did not extend to the cycle of all truth. The work was limited. The instruction was fragmentary. All revelation being gradual, the prophet's business was just to tell out plainly, and without reserve, what God willed men to know at that time, in order that they might be able to meet the spiritual exigencies of the moment. The appearance, however, of these prophets was a pledge and guarantee of the advent in the future of some great, some final prophet, of whom they were the typical representatives, and who should have it in His power to communicate the whole amount of the truth concerning the Divine Being, which it is necessary and possible for men under their present circumstances to receive. The expectation of such an arrival was strongest, of course, amongst the Jews ; but it was also shared in by other nations. And the general feeling on the subject may be well expressed in the simple language of the Samaritan woman—"I know that Messiah cometh : when He is come, He will declare unto us all things." That is to say—"all of us—all mankind—are looking for the rising of a Sun of Righteousness, who by the brilliancy and universal diffusion of His light, shall supersede the imperfect illumination under which we have hitherto been necessitated to walk."

That luminary rose when Jesus Christ entered the world. Then the period of the partial closed, and the period of the complete began. And in Jesus Christ, God gave us an exhaustive revelation of Himself—gave us the Prophet of prophets—gave us His own last word to the

human race. Now, this is expressed in the title "Apostle." And the inferences which we are intended to draw from the title, are obvious enough. All that we can know—all that we want to know—about Deity, is revealed to us by Jesus Christ, who has been sent as a messenger from heaven for that express purpose. I do not forget, of course, brethren, that there is the book of nature; or that there is the book of human history; and, indeed, the smaller book of our own individual experience—in the pages of which we are enabled to learn much about God. These are books of God, as well as the book of Holy Scripture. But in the Scripture (which stands pre-eminently and exceptionally above the others, and which is to be regarded as the utterance of Jesus Christ, through the Spirit), we have information about the Godhead, which we can obtain from no other source; we have answers to the questions about ourselves and our destiny; about the soul and its immortality; about our true relation to God, and the possibility of obtaining forgiveness for sin; about the meaning of suffering and of death—questions which, do what we will, we cannot altogether, and at all times, exclude from our thoughts. To the utterances, then, of Jesus Christ—the Great Prophet—we go for our teaching concerning God. And in the infinite depths of meaning in that Book which is especially His, we shall not fail to discover that which inspires us with motives to lift us up above our tendency to be mean and grovelling, into the higher, nobler regions of a spiritual life, a life with God. But this is not all. Christ is not only a revealer of God by His Word, He is also *in Himself* a revelation of God. "He that hath seen Me" (He says) "hath seen the Father." Do you wish then,

brethren, to know God? to know what He is, not in His essence—for that we may not hope to understand—but in His character? Do you wish to know His feelings towards you, His purposes and intentions, and all the magnificence of the plans which He is planning about you? Then look at Jesus Christ, and if your vision be not clouded by some theory, or darkened by some prejudice of your own, you shall assuredly come to know. Let the whole panorama pass before you. Don't take a part of it, take the whole. Look at Jesus—the lad in the Temple; the young man in the workshop in Nazareth; the preacher of the Kingdom on the hillside, or on the deck of the fishing-boat, by the white shore of the Sea of Galilee; look at Jesus at the marriage feast; Jesus in the market-place, watching with a kindly eye the sports of the little children; Jesus drawing publicans and sinners round Him by the fascination of His divine sympathy; now rolling the thunders of His tremendous invective over the hypocrisy and cruelty of the age, and now weeping bitter tears by the grave-side of the friend whom He loved. Look at Jesus in Gethsemane; in the Roman guardroom; before Pontius Pilate and Herod and the infuriated mob; Jesus on the Cross, in the tomb, and in His glorious resurrection. If you see these things rightly, you will see God in the very lineaments of unveiled Deity. And this Jesus is the “Apostle of our profession”—in Himself, as much as in the wonderful and gracious words that proceeded from time to time out of His mouth.

II.—Let us pass on to the second title, “High Priest.” I said, a few minutes ago, that just as we wanted some one to come to us from God, so we wanted some one to return from us to God, and to appear before Him on our behalf.

And what we want, we have. The high priest, under the old Jewish system, made an atonement by sacrifice for the sins of the people, and then went and stood in the Holy of Holies, to show that the sacrifice had been offered, and to plead that fact on behalf of the sinful and erring people, whom he represented there. Our High Priest does exactly the same, only in a real, and not in a figurative sense. He was with us upon earth. There, He offered upon the Cross of Calvary that mysterious sacrifice of Himself, by which He put away for ever the sins of His people. But He left us with the tokens of His passion upon His sacred body. He rose up from earth, passed through the heavens, and appeared before the eternal Father.

Of course, brethren, there are many reasons for Christ's appearance in heaven. But one of them—and perhaps the most important of them all—is this, that He should place His people (so to speak) before the very eye of God. We know that He is King of kings, and Lord of lords. All power has been given to Him, in heaven and in earth. But, for all that, He does not cease to be the Lamb that was slain; and it is by virtue of what He did upon earth, followed up by what He is doing in heaven now, that you and I can hope, can expect with the most absolute confidence—to obtain forgiveness of our every sin, if we sincerely and earnestly desire to be forgiven.

When that blood ceases to speak, when Jesus ceases to plead, because He has ceased to care for His own, when the Father ceases to hear the intercession of the only begotten Son—then, but not till then, may penitent sinners despair of the pardon of their transgression, and of their restoration to the favour and love of the merciful God.

And once again, the high priest in olden times bore the names of Israel on his heart, when he entered the audience-chamber of Jehovah. It is so with our own High Priest now. We are taught to believe that we are, each of us (insignificant as we are in ourselves), the object of His individualising care. Undistracted by the multitudinous affairs of the universe, in which He exercises His mediatorial authority, the Lord Jesus watches with an intent observation, over His own people, who are members of His mystical body, and dear to Him as His own soul. It is a wonderful thought, brethren. There are thousands, and tens of thousands, and thousands of thousands, of these followers of His upon the earth at the present time. They are scattered over every part of the globe—north, south, east, and west—and in all the islands of the sea. They are diverse in character, in temperament, in antecedents, in circumstances, in temptations, and trials, and therefore in their needs. And each of them requires his own special and peculiar spiritual treatment. But the God-man—in the power of His Deity, and in the true and tender sympathy of His manhood—gathers them all, with all their wants, into His loving bosom, and none are left out, or forgotten, or misunderstood, or mismanaged; and I—I a mere drop in the vast ocean of humanity—I (if I am a true disciple) may be as certain that my cry will be heard, and my case will be fully considered—I may be as certain of this, as if I were the only person in the whole wide range and stretch of the universe, whose necessities the Almighty Saviour had to attend to. But we must not stop here, brethren. Kindness is one thing, and sympathy is another. And sympathy is only begotten by personal experience of sorrow and pain.

An Incarnate God might have been expected to lead an easy life. Jesus Christ did not have an easy life. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He was (as one author says) "made perfect through sufferings." He would not—He could not—have been to us what He is, nor could we have reposed our present strong confidence in Him, had He not tasted the bitterness, as well as the sweets, of human existence.

But, He is one of us—bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh—and we come to Him as to no stranger. He "still remembers in the skies His tears, His agonies, and cries." "He is not one who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Therefore we draw near with boldness in His name to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

III.—I reserve the few minutes that remain for the discussion of our second point—the direction of the sacred writer that we should "consider" Jesus Christ. The word "consider" is, in the original at least, a very striking and significant one. It conveys the idea of a close and all-round examination; of an intent scrutiny; of a diligent search, prolonged until every feature of the object examined has passed under review, and the whole thing, so far as is possible, is completely and thoroughly understood. In such a way, brethren—with such diligence and earnestness—are we to fix our attention upon Jesus Christ. But I have little time to enlarge now. Let me use an illustration, and so conclude. You have probably seen, in some famous picture gallery, an enthusiastic and earnest artist,

bringing his easel, his canvas, his brushes, his pigments day by day, and planting himself down before the masterpiece of a great painter, for the purpose of copying it. Well aware that a mere superficial and transient examination of the picture will not be of any use—the man pores over his task for hours together. He is at the work early in the morning, and only leaves it when the gallery is closed. There is so much to be done. The picture will not yield up its thoughts except to diligent and loving search. And only by degrees can the artist master the general conception and the minute details—and for all this, time and pains are required. See there the image of a diligent student of the Word, who is anxious to find Jesus Christ in the page, and to realise Him ! But suppose, again, that whilst the artist was busy with his copying, the painter of that great masterpiece were himself to come near, and to tell the student his meaning, and to explain to him his methods, and perhaps to take the pencil from his hand and put a stroke or two into the copy—you feel at once what an unspeakable advantage it would be to the man, and how greatly it would help him in his task. But just such an advantage, brethren, we have. The Spirit of God Himself—who drew the likeness of Jesus in the Word—will come to us, if we will, and interpret His work, and take of the things of Christ, and show them to us. And this it is—to “ consider ” Jesus Christ. And the result of this considering Him will be—that, like the artist just described, we shall catch an inspiration from our Master, and be moulded more and more into His likeness ; that we shall take the same view that He does, of God, of man, of duty ; that we shall acquire by degrees the mind of Christ, and think according to Christ.

XXIII.

THE TEMPTATION IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN.

“ Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? ”—
GENESIS iii. 1.

I PROPOSE to discuss with you to-night, as fully as my limits will allow, the Mosaic account of the fall of man. Without adhering strictly to my text, but rather taking the whole chapter to which it belongs, I will consider with you—first, the steps, or the process of the temptation ; then, the results of the temptation, or, at least, some of them ; and, in the third place, the instrument or agency by which the temptation was effected. The process, the results, the instrument—these are the chief topics which I shall endeavour to bring before you.

Now when we cast a glance upon the sacred narrative in this chapter, there is one thing which seems to emerge at once to the view—and that is, that the writer of the narrative intended to imply, by his language, the existence and operation of a personal agent. I do not wish to dogmatise upon such a subject. But surely, if we come to the study of these verses of the book of Genesis without any prejudices

to influence us, or any theory to maintain—the first impression made upon our minds will be such as I describe. Observe, for instance, the plain historical cast of the story. Observe the particular mention of the subtilty of the serpent, and the sentence pronounced against it by the Judge. Of course there are difficulties. There must needs be. We cannot, for instance, explain the connection between the serpent and the tempter. But this we may venture to assert, that whether rightly or wrongly, it is meant that we should understand the serpent to have been, in some mysterious manner, the instrument which Satan employed for the accomplishment of his designs. Perhaps, however, we should not be inclined to speak with so much confidence, were it not for the distinct endorsement of the view which we have in the New Testament statements, and more particularly in the very words of the Saviour Himself. To take the latter first. Christ says—speaking of the fallen archangel—“He was a murderer from the beginning. A liar, and the father of it.” Or to come to the Apostles. St. Paul says, “the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty.” And in the same chapter—“Satan is transformed into an angel of light.” And St. John, in the 12th chapter of the book of the Revelation, speaks of “that old serpent, called the Devil and Satan—which deceiveth the whole world.” Now, unless we adopt the theory that Christ was misinformed and mistaken Himself; or the other theory that Christ, being perfectly well aware that Satan was a mythical personage, did yet accommodate Himself to the ignorant superstitions of His time, by using language which implied the existence of a non-existent Being—it seems exceedingly difficult to interpret,

except in one way, the statements of Holy Scripture upon this particular subject. Indeed, I think it hardly too much to say that there is as much Scriptural evidence for the personal existence of an evil spirit, as there is for the personal existence of the Holy Spirit of God. Or again, if we may go outside of Scripture—what advantage do you obtain by proving, if you can prove, the non-existence of the devil? If by getting rid of Satan, I could get rid also of that which is Satanic—I could see some sense in the endeavour to refute the ordinary belief. But if, after all said and done, the evil itself remains untouched—it seems to me that that labour is absolutely thrown away, which is expended upon the denial of the existence of a personal origin of evil.

I will not, however, detain you any longer upon this part of our subject. Assuming that the agent in the temptation of our first parents in the garden of Eden was a personal agent, we will advance to consider the stealthy and subtle steps by which he accomplished his work.

I.—Notice then, first, that the tempter is admitted into the garden. The garden was not a sacred enclosure, which he was forbidden to enter. It was not meant then, any more than it is meant now—that human beings should be protected from the assaults of temptation. Not the virtue which stands because it has never been tried, but the virtue which has passed through trial, and come triumphantly out of it—this is what God demands, and expects at the hand of His creatures. Just then, I say, as it is with us now, so was it with our great mother, Eve; temptation met her in the ordinary walk of daily life, and when she was occupied with the tasks which God had given her to fulfil. She had not wandered away into some specially perilous

region. She was separated indeed from her hasband at the moment, but not intentionally separated; and, as far as we can judge, she was tending her flowers, or trimming her garden, or engaged in some other of her ordinary duties—when temptation and the tempter crossed her path. Under these circumstances a voice, apparently proceeding from an animal she knew, and had no reason to dread—falls upon her ear. Now remember, if you please, that Eve, instead of being the prodigy of intellectual and spiritual capacity, which she is sometimes described as being, was more like a full-grown child in the world than anything else. She had everything to learn. And such an incident as this (which, had it occurred to any one of us, would have startled us into a condition of frantic perplexity) may be supposed to have excited no astonishment whatever in her imperfectly-instructed mind. A voice, then, is heard gently propounding the question—“Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” And here it was that the first human mistake occurred. A deadly meaning lay concealed in that seemingly innocent inquiry—“What! you do not really mean to tell me that God has put any limits to your enjoyment, and warned you off from any one of the trees of the garden? I think I must have misunderstood you. It is not likely that a Being so good and so kind, as you believe God to be, should act in such a manner. But if that really was your meaning, though I am unwilling to credit it, there is something a little inexplicable—(is there not?)—about such a prohibition as this? It is difficult to reconcile it with the notion one has always entertained about the goodness of the great Creator.”

Here, I say, occurred the first mistake, in Eve's lending

a listening ear to such ensnaring talk as this. She may have been—I think she was—intellectually a child ; but she had a moral instinct that must have given her warning, and must have hinted pretty plainly that even to parley with such an interlocutor as this, was a deviation from the path of duty. Clearly, what she ought to have done, was to have turned away at once from a being who cast a covert slur upon the character of her God, and to have refused to hold any further communication with him. And it may be well for us to notice, brethren, in passing, how closely this first temptation resembles, in this respect, all other subsequent temptations to which frail mortals have succumbed. If evil is to be successfully resisted, it must be resisted in its very beginnings. And in matters of morality—whatever it may be in matters of worldly prudence—our first impulses, our first thoughts, are invariably the best, and it is perilous to disregard them. We open a book, for instance. Before we have read more than a few pages we feel, almost instinctively, that the perusal of it will lower our tone, will unsettle our principles, will sully, it may be, our purity of mind. Or—we are thrown into the society of a very fascinating and attractive companion. There is a brilliance in his conversation, and an indescribable charm about his manner, which seem to cast a kind of spell over us. And yet—we know not how it is—something warns us that association with this fascinating person will endanger our highest well-being, and that we shall materially suffer, if we allow him to obtain an ascendancy over our minds. In such cases as these, the pathway of duty is plain and obvious enough. The line to be taken, is to be precisely the reverse of that taken by our first mother, Eve. There is to

be no parleying with the tempter, but instant, resolute, decisive, conclusive separation from him. Cherish an evil inclination, and the spark may burst out into a conflagration, which nothing whatever shall be able to quench. Put your foot upon the spark as soon as ever you see it gleaming, and you will succeed, God helping you, in stamping it out.

Another point of resemblance between the first temptation and all subsequent ones, is to be found in the injecting into the mind of suspicions about God, especially with reference to the prohibitions which He imposes upon us. In our better moments we can see that these prohibitions are intended for our good, that they are really evidences of the divine love and care and watchfulness over us, and that the great Father would never really deny His children anything but what He knows it would be injurious to them to possess. But when God puts limits to our self-indulgence, or (it may be) warns us altogether off from certain regions of enjoyment, is there not sometimes a feeling in our heart akin to that inspired by the tempter into the heart of Eve? and are we not sometimes inclined to suspect that the Creator grudges to see His creatures happy, and that there must be something exceptionally delicious about the fruit of the forbidden tree, inasmuch as it is so carefully guarded and placed beyond our reach?

But let us return to the narrative. The tempter has succeeded in getting the ear of his victim; nay, in leading her to question in her own mind the goodness of God. Hitherto, we may be sure, not a passing suspicion of that goodness has ever crossed her thoughts. Now, she stands doubtful and hesitating. "It does seem"—(we may suppose

her saying to herself)—“it does seem a little strange that we should be shut out from the use of that beautiful tree in the centre of the garden. It is the fairest, as well as the most conspicuous object in Paradise; and, doubtless, its fruit surpasses the fruit of all the other trees. There must be a reason for withholding it from us. Perhaps the serpent is right. Perhaps God grudges us the pleasure, and intends to keep it for Himself. I never saw the matter in this light before; but really, now I come to think of it, there is something strange and questionable about the prohibition which has been imposed upon us.” Here (as you see) a great step is gained. The ground is made ready for further advance. And Satan prepares to unfold another coil of his deadly temptation. But, before he speaks again, the woman replies, that God has given them just one single command; but that, to the violation of that command, he has attached a terrible penalty—the penalty of death. “God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it: neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.” Immediately the tempter discovers his opportunity, and seized it. “Ah! that is exactly what I suspected. Your good God is frightening you with a bugbear, just because He grudges you the blessings to which you might easily attain, if you liked. ‘Die!’ Nonsense! Why, God knows perfectly well that if you were to eat of the fruit of this tree, you would rise to a level with Himself. Independent, self-sustaining, self-controlled—you would become as gods, knowing good and evil. Judge, then, what His reason must be for putting that prohibition upon you.” And now, brethren, the mischief is done. The poison of unbelief and distrust has been infused and is working. The heart of the creature is lost to the Creator; and the mad desire of being

independent, of being a law unto themselves, of doing and thinking as they please—a desire which lies at the root of every form of sin—has laid hold upon our unhappy parents. Then comes the spirit of defiance, and the impulse of fleshly appetite; and they stretch forth their hand and take of the fruit, and eat.

II.—We consider, in the next place, the results of the temptation—I mean the results that appeared at once, and which are indeed the types and forerunners of all the results of successful temptation which we see in the world around us. The first is, a shrinking from the presence of God. Up to this time, it had been a delight to Adam and Eve to go forth and meet their Heavenly Visitant, when He descended to converse with them. Now, as soon as they are aware of His approach, they flee from Him and hide themselves among the trees of the garden. And are we not reminded by this circumstance of our own natural recoil from personal contact with God? You and I (I speak of what men are before the grace of Christ), you and I endeavour to put a barrier between ourselves and God. Do you know what I mean? Oftentimes we hurry through a round of gaieties, or—it may be—heap business upon business unnecessarily, with an unconscious desire of driving thought away, and of keeping God at a distance from us. Ask your worldly people. Do they like to be alone with their thoughts? Do they take pleasure in meditating about spiritual things? Will they consent, at any time, to come out from the whirl of life, and to draw nigh, face to face, into the presence of God? No! They will not. They prefer to hide themselves from their Maker among the trees of the garden. “Ah!” you say, “but these people often come

to church, and take their part in the solemn ordinances of public worship." They do. But, mark you, brethren, a mere outward observance of religion may be as effectual a screen between us and God, as anything else, perhaps even more effectual than anything else. If our religious service does not bring us into the actual presence of God—into actual living contact with God—it becomes a barrier between us and Him. God may be shut out from us by means of the very ordinances of His own appointment. And if we be destitute of spiritual life, and of desire for personal communion with our Heavenly Father, we may be singing praises, and praying prayers, and listening to sermons, but all the while be only hiding ourselves from the divine presence among the trees of the garden.

A second result is to be seen in the disunion of creatures, meant to be harmonious and united, meant to seek each other's well-being and happiness. Adam cares only for himself, and, in the hope of escape from censure, lays the blame on his wife. And she, on her part, fixes the fault upon the serpent. Neither, according to their own account, is very much to blame. Somebody else is. Thus, the immediate effect of transgression has been to sever the bonds of human society. It has been so ever since. Disorder, disorganisation, the breaking up into distinct and independent parts, of what was intended to form a coherent and harmonious whole ; the disintegration of communities, the destruction of the feeling and of the idea of brotherhood—these things have ever flowed from that assertion of independence upon God, which is the root of all sin. And, on the other hand, men have ever become united, and mutually helpful, and kind, and self-sacrificing, in proportion as they have been

enabled to retrace their steps, and to realise, in happy confidence and trust, their entire dependence upon their God and Father in Christ.

I see a third result in the half insolent, half cowardly (the combination is by no means an uncommon one), the half insolent, half cowardly manner in which Adam retorts the charge upon God Himself. "The woman, whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." "Thou accusest me, but it is, in a measure, Thy fault. It was Thine own gift that brought me into this trouble. Take the blame to Thyself. How could I have acted otherwise?" We have here the first of those excuses for sinning, which men have made for themselves in every successive generation since the time of Adam. Whenever we plead, in self-defence, "I was so situated that I could not possibly have done what was right; I had no other way of extrication but by the path which you are pleased to denominate sin:" or whenever we say (as I fear we sometimes do), "Look at my constitution, the constitution which my Creator gave me. Consider the fierceness of my passions, the strength of my appetites, the feebleness of my inclination to good—how could you expect my life to be other than what it has been"—whenever we say such things, we are simply repeating in other words our forefather's abject and yet defiant exclamation: "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat."

III.—But I must quit this point, and pass on to our third and concluding topic—the instrument which the tempter employed to make his temptation successful. That instrument was—falsehood. He persuaded Eve to believe a lie. And observe, I pray you, with what marvellous subtilty the

lie was constructed, and what a mixture of truth and falsehood there was in it ! It was not a lie pure and unmixed. No lie that passes current in the world, and does its fatal work, ever is a lie pure and unmixed. "Ye shall not surely die," he says. True—so far that outward death did not immediately follow upon the enjoyment of the forbidden fruit. "Ye shall know good and evil." True again—in the letter. But what a knowledge it was ! God knew good and evil, and man did come to know good and evil—but the two ways of knowing were very different things. "Ye shall be as gods." True again—in a sense. Man did achieve false independence ; he became a law to himself, and a curse to himself. With what marvellous skill the truth and the falsehood are intertwined in these statements ! And Satan uses precisely the same weapons now—falsehood, but falsehood with a certain admixture in it of the element of truth. Let me give you a simple instance. The preacher stands up and urges upon his unconverted, unspiritual hearers to repent, and to turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart. He points out the absolute necessity (beyond and above all excellence of character and propriety of conduct), the absolute necessity of a living union, through faith, with the living Jesus Christ. Not depreciating outward ordinances, but rather insisting earnestly upon their importance ; not undervaluing good works, but rather making much of them—he yet presses home the indispensableness of a spiritual transaction between God the Holy Ghost and the soul, by virtue of which the man shall come out of the world and range himself, distinctly and avowedly, on the side of the Kingdom of Light. And then the preacher—gathering himself up for one final effort—pleads

for an immediate decision, because the Apostle tells him that, "now is the accepted time, and now is the day of salvation." But in the great majority of cases, all his representations—plead he as earnestly as he may—fail to produce the slightest effect. And why? because at the back of the heart the tempter is secretly whispering, "Give no heed to that foolish rant. The man is paid for speaking so. It is just a piece of acting, nothing else. You, of course, know better than to believe such stuff and balderdash. No! Thou shalt not surely die. God is merciful, and thou art not bad enough to be cast into hell." And then he whispers again: "And if it be true, as that man asserts, that a change of heart is necessary, why, thou mayest get that at any time merely for the asking for it. So, go on. Carry out thy schemes. Pursue thy pleasures. There will be time enough for all this. Thou shalt not surely die."

And the tempter speaks truth—so far as the mere letter of the statement is concerned. The man does not die. He lives on. He sits in his pew. He listens to sermons. But the soul within him is perishing, mortifying, dying, *dying*. And then, when the time of his departure comes, and the man in alarm begins to think in earnest about God, sends hastily for Christian friends, calls for his pastor to pray with him, to instruct him, to comfort him, perhaps to administer to him, at the last gasp, the Holy Communion which he has persistently neglected all through his life—then the tempter turns round upon him with another lie. "Too late! Too late! God will not receive you after such a life as you have led. No repentance, no faith will avail you now." Another lie! but what wonder if the hapless soul believes it

in its despair, and passes out into the dark and hideous banishment of an undone eternity?

Thus, brethren, have I discussed with you my three points—the process, the results, the instrument of the temptation, as recorded by Moses in the third chapter of the book of Genesis. This only I wish to be permitted to add, that, although I am quite alive to the difficulties besetting the interpretation of so mysterious a narrative as that of the Fall, I have no difficulty whatever in accepting the literal accuracy of the narrative, when I observe the exact correspondence, as to character, and process, and results—between temptation now, and the temptation to which our first parents fell victims in the beautiful garden of Eden.



XXIV.

WATERLOO, AND ITS LESSONS.

“The waves of the sea are mighty, and rage horribly; but yet the Lord, who dwelleth on high—is mightier.”—PSALM xciii. 5
(Prayer Book Version).

ON a certain Sunday evening—seventy-five years ago—the Psalm from which my text has been taken was said or sung in all the parish churches of England, almost at the very moment when a fierce and bloody conflict was being decided on the plains of Waterloo. The anniversary of the famous battle fell this year on a Wednesday. I had to preach at our usual weekday service, and, as I remembered that I should begin my sermon at half-past eight o'clock, I made up my mind to speak about the subject, and took for my text the verse just quoted—from the Psalms for the evening. It was at eight o'clock, or thereabouts, that the French Emperor's "old Guard" made their last tremendous attack upon our lines. It was at half-past eight that their charge had been repulsed, and the victory virtually wrested from their grasp. It seemed well then, brethren, under the circumstances, not to pass the matter by without mention. And seeing that I am preaching to-night to young Englishmen—it may not be unsuitable to repeat my address of that Wednesday, with

a little more elaboration, perhaps, in matters of detail. The event described, and commented upon, is indeed now in the very distant past. Our young people, naturally, do not think much about it. The noble foe who stood against us on the field of Waterloo has been transformed by the healing processes of time into a generous and kindly friend ; and long may the cordial amity, which has been established between the two nations, continue to exist ! But still, it would be ungrateful—it would be unwise—not to cast an occasional backward look upon a day so momentous in the history of England and of Europe—a day which illustrated the peculiar characteristics with which our race has been endowed, and, what is of more importance still, the providential interference of the Lord God of Hosts in the affairs of men. Let us then take up the subject again, and discuss it. I will begin—as I began before—with a slight sketch (it can only, of course, be a slight one) of the circumstances preceding the battle, and of the battle itself.

I.—Napoleon had burst out of the island of Elba ; roused the martial spirit of the French people by the magic of his presence ; gathered together one of the best armies which he had ever led into the field ; and seemed in a fair way to be able to resume his former ascendancy amongst the nations of Europe. It was necessary to stop him ; and the Duke of Wellington, at the head of the allies, was sent to do it. Now, without disparagement to the character of our grand fellow-countryman, who was a skilful General, and who is said never to have lost a battle—it is not, perhaps, too much to affirm that, in point of genius for war, he was not the equal of his formidable antagonist. The French Emperor was one of the great warriors of the

human race ; and to such a title the British leader—whose chief idea was to do his duty—would not even have cared to aspire. Here then—we may say—was an inequality to begin with. In addition to this, Napoleon had the larger, and by far better force. He commanded 72,000 men ; and these included the choicest troops in his army, and a large proportion of his veteran soldiers, trained under his own eye on many a bloody battlefield ; and nothing could surpass their devotion to him, their enthusiasm for his cause, their assured conviction that he must win the day. The forces under the British General were nominally 67,500 men—but there were very many of them upon whom no real dependence could be placed ; and there were only 25,000 British troops, of all arms, under his command ; and of these, a large proportion were raw recruits, who had never yet been exposed to fire. What a fearful inequality there was—as far as the forces engaged were concerned—it is easy enough to perceive. On the one side, a vast and compact host—experienced in war, and bound together as one man, by attachment to their leader, and by confidence in his success ; on the other, an inferior number of troops (*very* inferior in cavalry and artillery), and this body composed of various materials—some of them so ill-affected, that they actually fled from the battlefield, at a moment when their services were most imperatively required. Under these circumstances, it seemed a hazardous thing for Wellington to throw himself across the path of his great opponent ; but the thing had to be done : and he did it. And after all, he had something to rely upon. He had the advantage in position. Very carefully had he selected and reconnoitred the ground, and he had made a most skilful disposition

of his troops. Nothing was forgotten or omitted. His arrangements with the Prussian Marshal were complete; the two commanders understood one another, and trusted one another thoroughly. Wellington was to hold the French in check until the Prussians came up and joined forces with him. And then, he could repose implicit confidence in his own British troops, few as they were in comparison, and upon the gallant German legionaries who were associated with them. Still, the hazard was great. It was by no means impossible that something might occur to delay the advance of the Prussians—as indeed proved to be the case; and it was by no means impossible that the military skill of Napoleon, backed as it was by the devotion of his troops, and by the tremendous power of his cavalry and artillery, might avail to decide the battle before the auxiliaries arrived on the field.

Wellington, I believe, never doubted about the issue. To use his own plain, uninflated language—he felt sure “that all would go well.” But looking at the state of things just at this particular juncture—it is surely not to be considered as out of the question, that the scale of victory might—and might very probably—have inclined the wrong way.

When the French Emperor discovered that his antagonist had not retreated, but seemed determined to await his onset, his delight was unbounded. He had got the man in his grasp—he exclaimed—and would speedily crush him. And in this assured confidence of victory, he and his army spent the night which preceded the engagement.

On the morning of the 18th, he put the battle in array. For some reason or other, perhaps with the idea of striking

terror by making his force seem larger than it was, he led his troops out in a sort of parade before the eyes of their enemies. The scene is spoken of, by those who witnessed it, as something indescribably magnificent. The 72,000 men—15,000 of whom were splendid cavalry—with 240 guns—came almost suddenly upon the scene. It was a mighty mass of fighting-power—revealed, as if by magic—in all the majesty of strength and the beauty of order—and trembling with eagerness for the fray. But the foe just stood grimly and calmly on the opposite heights, to witness Napoleon Bonaparte's last grand review. By ten o'clock all were in position ; but it was twenty minutes past eleven when the battle began. "There it goes !" remarked a cool old Peninsular veteran, on the British side—when he heard the boom of the first gun ; and soon a furious cannonading set in. Now, it seems a strange thing—indeed, I think we may call it "providential" that Napoleon, to whom every moment was really of importance, and with whom the initiative rested, should have allowed so much time to pass away before he commenced the attack. The 18th of June is very near to the longest day of the year ; and there must have been many hours of light (six or seven at least), of which one would have expected him to have taken advantage. But he did not. Various reasons have been assigned for the delay ; the most likely, I believe, being this—that, Napoleon's presumptuous confidence in his own genius, and in the superiority of the army he led—induced him to despise his enemy. Thinking that he had now got Wellington at his mercy, and knowing but little of the valour and steadfastness of the British soldier—he felt sure that there was no real occasion for hurry. He could afford to let

his troops rest for awhile; there would be time enough between eleven o'clock and the evening to crush his enemies, and send them flying like chaff before the wind.

About the battle itself, I must, of course, venture to say but little. I have already occupied more time than I intended to do in discussing the first part of my subject. But two points I must be allowed to touch upon; for they seem to illustrate the remarks which I hope to offer presently.

First, the conduct of the British troops. It is a comparatively easy thing, I think, for men to fight. It comes natural to them (perhaps some of you will say—"the more's the pity"). Well, brethren, I am inclined to say "Yes, and No." All human life—all our present human life—seems to me to partake of the nature of a battle. If we do not fight with the sword, we fight with some other weapon—with tongue, or pen, or influence—in the great conflict that is ever going on in the world between right and wrong, between truth and falsehood; and the soldiers' way of fighting is only another form of the general occupation. However, whether this be so, or not—men are ever ready (indeed, too ready) to fight; and each nation that is worth calling a nation, has its own peculiar kind of valour. Fighting then, I say, is easy—or comparatively so—when the blood is up; and when you are rushing with your comrades, stimulated by their presence and ardour, on the ranks of the foe. But, to stand in your place to be shot at! To stand there for hours! To occupy your post, without being allowed to move—till you drop at it; and to do this, simply because it is your duty to do it—simply because you are obeying orders—Ah! that is a very different kind of

thing. And that is what our soldiers did. The deadly artillery of Napoleon played upon them hour after hour, mowing them down by scores, breaking long lines through their ranks: the whirlwind of French horsemen swept round and round the squares, madly trying to force their way, but never finding an inlet. Over and over again, the furious tide rolled up; but the squares stood there—lessening, of course, in number, but rooted to the ground: living fortresses—firm, immovable, as some iron-bound rock upon which the wild waves dash themselves fruitlessly, and fall back in froth and spray. Brethren, *it was the triumph of duty!* and we Englishmen may well be thankful—if only we learn the lesson, and perpetuate the traditions of our forefathers—for the bloodstained field of Waterloo.

Then, I wish to speak of what happened that day between eight and nine o'clock in the evening. Napoleon gathered himself up for a final effort. Of his grand reserve—the old Imperial Guard—he had already despatched a portion to check the advance of the Prussians; but he still retained in hand some 10,000 or 12,000 men. They were the flower of his army—the chosen and indomitable veterans—upon whom he depended for securing the victory. And when he sent them forth upon our lines, it seemed as if the fortunes of the day hung upon a single thread. In two huge columns, one turning to the left, the other to the right, these brave enemies of ours moved down the slope of the valley, which lay between the contending armies. As they descended, the French artillery played furiously over their heads upon our troops, but stopped their fire when the vanguard of their comrades was seen rising up to the opposite ridge. On, then, came the dark column!—that on the

right. It had started some few minutes before the other—on it came! Will it break our lines? No! The “guards” flew at them, and hurled them back in confusion, down the valley. But there is yet another chance! Again the fortunes of the day seemed to hang on a single thread. The other column may be successful. It is rapidly ascending the slope—that formidable engine of war—massive, ponderous, almost irresistible in its living strength. But it met with the same fate as its predecessor. It encountered the artillery-fire and the roll of musketry from the British guards, but still steadily kept on its way, when the commanding officer of the 32nd regiment, by a sort of sudden inspiration wheeled his men round, and attacked the heavy mass by a flank movement. This threw the French into disorder—“crushed” them (to use the expression of one of their own historians); and the English General, seizing the opportunity, launched his troops like a thunderbolt against the column, and swept it before him, in hopeless confusion, across the front of the allied position.

The battle was now virtually won. By this time the June sun was setting over the field; and with it were setting Napoleon’s hopes of victory. “Duty” had met “glory” at Waterloo, and “duty” had triumphed. And the Prussians, when they appeared upon the scene, turned what was already a defeat into an irretrievable disaster.

II.—I pass on to my moralising: and here I shall call in the text—or rather the whole Psalm, to which the text belongs—to help me.

“The Lord is King”—says the Psalmist. He rules over the affairs of men, possibly without their knowing it, or being willing to recognise it. But every now and then He

comes forth in His majesty, and is *manifested as King*. Such occasions are to be found in the great crises of human history—such as that which we have been considering to-night—when the tide of some mighty onward movement is checked and rolled backward, and the destinies of the world and of mankind are altered for ever. Then—if only we have the discernment to see it—the Lord almost visibly interferes in the affairs of the race, or (as Scripture says)—makes bare His holy arm before the eyes of the nations.

The next thought of the Psalmist is that of the unchangeableness—the absolute immovability of God—amidst the weltering confusion, the anarchy (as it seems to be) of the world in which we are placed. The Psalmist pictures the tumultuous tossings of the ocean in the time of a storm. Few of us, I suppose, have been witnesses of such a scene. And fewer—I doubt not—would wish to be. But we can imagine it. Nothing, perhaps—not even a vast conflagration—could inspire such a conception of the tremendous forces of nature, when she arises in her might; nothing could make us feel the almost absolute impossibility of bringing such forces under subjection and control. But the Lord sitteth above the waterfloods, and rules them. They are simply doing His bidding; and He guides them to His own ends, precisely as a skilful rider—with firm hand and immovable seat—guides in any direction he chooses a fiery and apparently unmanageable steed. But *what* are these waves and billows? They are the tides and drifts of human passion; the sweep of the conqueror over the battlefield; the conflict of parties in the state or in the senate; the rise and the fall of dynasties; the strife and struggle of opinion; the bitter animosities of class against class; the

oppressions ; the cruelties ; the sins ; ay, and do not let us forget the goodness too—which together make up the sum of the history of man, as contemplated at any one time. What a confusion it all is ! Nay, brethren—it only seems so. It is not. “The waves of the sea are mighty and rage horribly ; but the Lord, who dwelleth on high (overlooking them), is mightier.” I say, then, Don’t let us forget that the Lord reigneth. We are apt to do so, sometimes. A little while ago I met with a good illustration of this point. A famous negro orator—a man of remarkable eloquence—one Frederick Douglass—was once addressing a vast multitude of slaves. Fired with the thought of the wrongs of his race, the speaker gradually worked himself and his audience up almost to a state of frenzy (and was there not cause for it ?), and at last burst out with the tremendous exclamation—that now they must right themselves with the strength of their own arms ; for that there was no deliverance to be found for the negro anywhere else under the broad canopy of heaven. On the utterance of these words, an old, white-haired, tall, negro woman, well-known by her people, rose up in the hall, and—amidst the silence which succeeded her rising—said, in a low, emphatic voice, which, low as it was, thrilled through the vast concourse, and spell-bound every heart in it—“*Frederick ? is God Almighty dead ?*” She said no more. But it was enough. No, brethren, God is not dead. And God interferes still, unmistakably, in the affairs of men. We ourselves have seen His working—well, not at Waterloo ; for I think there is only one man in our whole congregation who is old enough to remember that famous battle—and he, I know, is not here to-night. But some of us—I for one—have

heard our parents speak of it. Waterloo—was a “household word” with our family when I was a schoolboy. The great conflict had not been then forgotten. But we have seen other things. We have seen the downfall of the Third Napoleonic Empire—a showy, shabby-genteel, shoddy structure—built on a hideous foundation of unrighteousness and falsehood. We have seen the dread conflict between the Northern and Southern States across the Atlantic, which ended in the liberation of the slave. And I hope to live to see (though perhaps I shall not—but some of you young men may) the crumbling away, the final disappearance, of that foul Turkish rule—which curses and blasts every soil that it plants its foot upon. Yes! The Lord is not dead. He is not even asleep. The Lord is King.

Once more, and lastly, let us learn to be hopeful about our country, and to live so as to be a credit and a help to her. I have often said, my younger brethren, that, though there are many, many blots upon our escutcheon—such as drink, such as gambling, both of which threaten to eat out the very life of our nation, and such as our treatment of less powerful races—witness our forcing of the deadly opium traffic upon reluctant China—in spite of these things, there is much that is encouraging amongst us. Surely we are trying to mend our ways. Surely the national conscience is roused to an unwonted degree; and surely the grim inarticulate Englishman, who cannot chatter much, and of whom Napoleon himself said that he is too stolid to know when he is beaten—is forcing his way in every direction resolutely into the right. Am I too sanguine? I trust not. It is a bad thing to despair of your fatherland. And I don't like to do it. And then I have another hope for our

country. God has given to us, and to us alone amongst men, two gifts in combination—the gift of the Gospel, and the gift of the faculty of colonising, of scattering daughter-peoples over the face of the earth. Surely this too is significant, and points to the fact that we have a great, a magnificent, an almost boundless future for good before us.

But, sanguine though I may be, brethren, I am not so sanguine as to believe that we shall rise to the greatness of our opportunities apart from true religion, and without the aid of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The regeneration of the individual must precede the regeneration of the State. And if you young men wish to become worthy citizens of the noble country to which you belong, you can only hope to do so effectually by taking Jesus Christ into your calculations—nay, into your hearts, into your lives; and by so becoming, first of all, citizens of that city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.



XXV.

WHO ARE THEY THAT MAKE A MOCK AT SIN?

“Fools make a mock at sin.”—PROVERBS xvi. 9.

WE have just been listening to the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, and with that parable ringing in our ears we need not be afraid of affirming the existence of two distinct parties in the world, or of drawing a deep and strong line of demarcation as to character, and tendency, and ultimate destiny—between them. It is customary with some persons to call this distinction an erroneous one. According to them, all people—or at least all people in a baptised community—are Christians, be their conduct what it may. The Christianity, they tell us, may stand at a very low level; it may be of an extremely undeveloped character—still, there it is. The man is the son of a Heavenly Father, and we are not, they tell us, justified in asserting that the tendency of his life is a downward one, or that his principles are putting him into direct antagonism to the will and purpose of God.

Now, this is precisely what we *do* assert, and precisely what we think Scripture entitles us to assert. At the same time, we should like to guard ourselves against a possible misconstruction. We have no sympathy with that exclusive

spirit which ignores every Christianity that is not stamped with its own superscription, and backed by its own endorsement. There are good narrow-minded people in the world who seem quite unable to recognise the fruits of the Spirit unless these fruits are presented on a dish of the pattern they approve. Profess your inability to see eye to eye with them on some difficult point of doctrine, or some question of Scriptural interpretation—and they unchristianise you without ceremony. You are of the unregenerate; you are unconverted and unspiritual; and if you do not come round to their way of thinking, and that soon—your chance of attaining eternal life is infinitesimally small.

With this sort of thing we have no manner of sympathy. To say nothing of its uncharity, it is so defiant of fact. Why, look abroad upon the world, and notice how God seems to delight in variety! There is variety everywhere in the kingdom of nature, and variety everywhere in the kingdom of grace. And we feel that we have no more right to demand that all Christians should think alike, should be shaped in the same mould, and run in the same groove, than we have to expect that all men should wear the same set of features, and be of exactly the same build, and of precisely the same stature.

But still, although we are disposed to make a very wide allowance for characteristic differences, and although we should shrink—except in cases of open profligacy, or obvious contempt of religion—from pronouncing upon the spiritual condition of any particular individual, we have no hesitation whatever in breaking up the large masses of mankind into two distinct and antagonistic portions. To do so, Christian brethren, is one thing; to pass judgment upon an individual

is altogether another thing. In the one case I may be mistaken ; in the other I cannot be. Scripture is my warrant for drawing a line of demarcation, and for asserting that some stand on one side of it, and that others stand on the other.

Now, I would ask you to notice that this distinction, everywhere, as I think, recognised—is expressed in different language in different parts of Holy Scripture. Take, for instance, the Book of Psalms. There the contrast is between the “righteous” and the “unrighteous.” The idea in the mind of the Psalmist is obviously this : that the one party is on the side of the right, and the other on the side of the wrong. Justice, fairness, equity, truth, honour, rightness with God and man—these are the questions involved ; and whilst the one set of people maintain and defend them, the other is altogether antagonistic and adverse. Come down to the New Testament. There the contrast is between the “Church” and the “world”—the difference, as you would expect, being removed to a higher region. On the one side are those who hold to Christ, who love Christ, who serve Christ, who form the mystical body of Christ—and on the other are those who turn away from the higher life, from that conversation which is in heaven, and who make things of time the one aim, and end, and object of their existence.

But now look at the Book of Proverbs. It is the book of prudence and common sense. In it religion does not take the highest possible ground ; indeed, it takes rather low ground. But even here it meets its antagonists, and vindicates its superiority. It is better even as far as this world is concerned, to say nothing of another—it is better to be religious than it is to be irreligious. It pays better, it

brings more happiness, it brings more prosperity, it brings more comfort. The godless, in the long run, suffer; the godly, in the long run, succeed. This is the key-note to which the Book of Proverbs is set; and in accordance with this is the phraseology which it adopts when it speaks of the division which exists among men. It divides them into two classes; but whilst the Psalms speak of the "righteous" and the "unrighteous," and the New Testament speaks of the "Church" and the "world"—the Book of Proverbs speaks of those who are "wise" and those who are "fools." A characteristic distinction, brethren! The godly—those who live for God—are wise: the ungodly—those who live for self and the world—are fools.

I.—Now, our text tells us that the fools make a mock at sin. We will consider, then, three points; the first, why the Scripture calls the ungodly "fools;" the second, what is it to "make a mock at sin;" the third, why is it a proof of folly to "make a mock at sin?" In the first place, then, why does Scripture call the ungodly "fools?"

Now, brethren, we are not to understand by that expression, "ungodly," only the open and profligate sinners. About *their* folly, of course, there can be no manner of question. If you see a man drinking of a cup that is poisonous, simply because the taste is sweet, and his palate is gratified by it; if he is told that the liquid, luscious as it is, will run, ultimately, like molten fire through his veins, and cause him to writhe in hideous and indescribable torture; and if, in spite of this information, he persists in glueing his lips to the cup, and in draining the draught—you may pity him for the consequences that are sure to follow, but you will surely regard him as a "fool." No

other name will suit a man who ensures certain misery in the future for the sake of a present gratification. And this is—is it not?—a fair description of the open sinner ; of the man who lives an evil life and despises the commandments of God. He gets present pleasure, but he lays up a store of future misery. He tells you, his motto is—“a short life, and a merry one.” He despises the “slowness,” as he calls it, of those who prefer to live by rule, and are contented to wait patiently rather than to clutch greedily at immediate gratification. He flares and blazes like a candle put into a red-hot candlestick, and then—he gutters out. Alas ! what are we to say about such an one ? for he sacrificed the solid for the seeming ; the future for the present ; he grasped at the shadow, and chose it, when he might have possessed and enjoyed the substance.

“Oh ! but,” cries someone, “I am as unlike this man as you can possibly conceive. I am not religious, I grant. I hear you talk about loving, and serving, and imitating, and following the Lord Jesus Christ ; and I suppose it is quite correct for you to talk so, but to me it is simply unintelligible. I am not religious, I say ; but yet I am not living a sinful life. Far from it ! My character is unimpeachable, and I do my duty ; and I really cannot understand why you should not let me alone. You preachers are always attacking me ; but I cannot comprehend the reason. Does it never occur to you that, if such people as I am are not to be admitted into heaven, there will actually not be inhabitants enough to fill the place ?”

Now, if I may speak the honest truth, brethren, I must say that I consider this man almost as foolish, though not foolish in such a disagreeable way, as the other. Consider

for a moment. What would you think of me—if I have to live for a year, and yet make just provision enough for a week? What would you think of me—if I had to take a journey of a thousand miles, and carried with me only equipments and appliances and food enough for the first fifty? What would you say of me—if you knew I was going to spend the rest of my life in a foreign country, and if you knew that I had taken no pains to inquire into the character of its inhabitants, or to secure for myself a favourable reception when I arrived there? What would you think of me—if I had an estate left me, and took no trouble to secure the title deeds? or, if I was to be tried for my life, and never bestirred myself to prepare a defence? or to provide myself with an advocate? Well, you might like me; you might say, perhaps, that I was a pleasant sort of person. You might allow I was amiable, and upright, and kind. But surely wisdom, and common sense, and prudence, are not the qualities that you would be likely to credit me with.

Now you who, by your own confession, are living for this world only, and neglecting the world to come—let me talk the matter quietly over with you. You have made, you are making provision for this life. Yes; but, beyond this life stretches—eternity. The years you spend here, even if you should live far beyond the usual age of men, are but only a drop in the ocean, when you compare them with eternity. But for eternity, as you admit, you have made no preparation. Eternity is an element left altogether out of your calculation. What are we to say about the *wisdom* of this?

Again, in a few years you will go hence, and be no more seen. You will pass into another region, another country.

What about it? Have you ascertained the nature of the country? the character of the inhabitants? the conditions of residence in it? Have you secured for yourself, or done anything to secure for yourself, a favourable reception when you arrive on its shores? *No? You have not?* Well, then, what are we to think of the wisdom of this neglect? And again, an inheritance has been offered you. It is a vast inheritance. Earthly treasure, earthly grandeur, is as nothing when compared with it. But there are certain steps necessary to be taken in order to secure that inheritance. Have you taken those steps? *No? You have not?* Then what are we to think of the wisdom of your having omitted to do so?

And yet again, a day is coming when you will have to answer for the life you have led upon earth. You will have to stand before the judgment-seat of Christ; in the full blaze of the light of God's eternal throne, and make your defence before Him who searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins. There is only one method by which you can hope to come scathless out of this terrible ordeal, and that is, by securing as your Advocate and your Friend, the Friend of sinners, the Incarnate Son of God. Have you made a friend of this powerful Personage? *No!* But you are "intending to do so, some day; some day before it is too late."

And again I ask you, what are we to think of the wisdom, the prudence, the common sense—which you are manifesting in this most perilous delay? What are we to think? Why, there is only one thing to think. Down upon your knees before God, you man of integrities, and excellencies, but without religion—you who find your salvation in your

own character, and neglect Jesus Christ; down upon your knees before God, and confess that Scripture made no mistake when it called you a "fool!"

II.—In the second place, what is it "to make a mock at sin?" Clearly, to speak of it in a trifling way and to make jokes about it. A Christian man will never speak of sin without a certain awe. It is the thing which destroys the human race; it is "the abominable thing" which God hates. The Christian cannot bring himself to jest about it. It is far too solemn a matter. Other men may laugh about moral evil; or may give nicknames to Satan; or may ridicule the "preciseness," as they call it, of those who endeavour to avoid the contamination and pollution of sin. He can do nothing of the kind. Sin is too serious a matter in his eyes to jest about. But there are other ways, I think, of making a mock of sin—and one is—by glossing over wrongdoing by fair and specious names. Call a young fellow "a little wild," or "a little unsteady"—when he is posting to the Devil as fast as he can go; call a licentious life a "gay" life; call drunkenness and gluttony "good fellowship;" call dishonesty "smartness," and cheating "dexterity;"—and, it strikes me, you are indulging in the habit attributed to the persons spoken of in our text. You are "making a mock at sin." Yet again, I think you must not acquit a man of complicity in this offence, if you find him incapable of expressing indignation against moral evil. It is part of a godly character to hate sin. A righteous indignation is always found in a living soul. And if a man can hear of unrighteous, and oppressive, and selfish acts, without being moved thereby to anger, depend upon it that man has not a living soul within him; he has not been made a subject of

the converting grace of God. To be indifferent about sin, to treat it with toleration, with leniency, with indifference—is as bad a sign of our spiritual condition as can well be imagined ; it is, virtually, to “make a mock at sin.”

III.—In the third and last place, let us consider why it is a proof of folly “to make a mock at sin.” The answer rises to the lips at once—indeed I have already suggested it—because sin is so terrible and so deadly a thing, so fearful an enemy, both to God and man. You have heard, I suppose, that many, very many years ago, during the prevalence of that strange Asiatic disease, the cholera, in Paris, when death was sweeping like a dark flood over that fair city, and leaving behind it, as it passed, a sad array of writhing frames, and blackened corpses, and sorrowing households—some persons held a grotesque ball, with fanciful dresses, in mockery of the plague ; in mockery, we may say, of the hand of God that was pressing heavily upon the people. It seems almost incredible that at such a time, when no one knew that his turn might not come next, that he might not be called away to undergo the hideous agony, and to fill the hastily prepared grave—any one could be found to extract merriment from such an awful subject. Yet such persons were found. A “cholera ball” was held, with dances and dresses in character.

Into such mad and godless infatuation, we feel, I doubt not, that we are not at all likely to fall ; and yet we do something like it, if ever we make merry with the subject of sin. It is like jesting about the invisible pestilence, when it is floating round our homes, and threatening to sow in our bodies, on every breath of air that passes—the seeds of agony and death. Yes ! Sin, to the Christian man, is so

terrible a thing, that he cannot trifle with it. He sees it, as God sees it; as the angels see it; as holy men see it; and he sees that it is no subject for a jest. Sin fills the world with misery and death. Did you ever shrink at the sight of suffering? It was that sin caused that suffering. Did you ever recoil, disgusted and alarmed, from the tumult of evil passions? It was sin that called them into being, and gave them their existence. And sin—we can say nothing worse against it than this—sin had power to drag down the eternal Son of God Himself from His throne. Who would have thought that He was accessible there? Who would have thought that He could have been reached amidst the blaze of the splendour of His Father's glory? Yet, sin reached Him even there. It bid Him come down; and He came. And when it had drawn Him within the range of its influence, it harassed, and persecuted, and oppressed, and wearied Him—until at last it brought Him to the Cross, and, to all appearance, destroyed Him for ever. Surely, then, to be so ignorant of the true nature of sin, is a proof of folly. Surely when wise men mourn over so terrible an evil, it is only fools who can make a mock at sin.

And now, lastly, what brief practical lesson shall we gather from our subject? Just this, brethren, that you and I should make it our very earnest endeavour *to see things as they are*, as God sees them; and not to pass through life with a mistaken estimate of the world in which we are placed. There are just two classes in the world—only two, after all; those who are in Christ, and those who are out of Christ. Those who are “in Christ” may not be very intelligent, or very learned, or very shrewd; but from the fact of their position, and from the fact of their possessing the teaching

of the Holy Spirit—they see things as they are. Those who are out of Christ may be sharp, and able, and learned; but they are altogether confused, and perplexed, and mistaken about the world in which they are placed. They take—(they cannot help doing so)—the false for the true, the hollow for the solid, the shadow for the substance. To them, brethren, let us not belong. It will be a poor look out for us if, after a career of the most brilliant kind, and a worldly success the most perfect, we should have to confess at last—“My life has been one great failure; one enormous miscalculation. I have sought for happiness, where happiness could not be found. I have spent my money for that which is not bread, and my labour for that which satisfieth not.”



XXVI.

WHO IS THIS?

“Who is this?”—MATTHEW xxi. 10 (part).

IT may seem a little strange that such a question should be asked about Jesus of Nazareth, who certainly was, and had been for some years past, the best-known personage in the whole of the country; but the people who asked the question were Jews from distant parts of the world, newly arrived in the Holy City, for the purpose of taking part in the approaching Passover feast. They, of course, were not familiar with the features of the Prophet of Nazareth—if indeed they had ever heard of Him at all—and when they witnessed, what, to them, must have been a very unaccountable spectacle, a man riding on an ass-colt, surrounded by a crowd who were waving palm-branches in the air, and making the walls of Jerusalem ring with their shouts and cries—they were naturally filled with surprise, and led to inquire what it was that the procession and the tumult meant.

It may also seem a little strange that Jesus should have decided upon entering the city in such a fashion as this. Hitherto He had shunned publicity. Not, of course, at any time denying that He was the Messiah; or refusing Messianic homage when it was proffered Him—He yet

kept His Messiahship in the background: He hinted and implied it, rather than spoke about it openly; and on one memorable occasion expressly prohibited His disciples from telling anybody that He was Jesus the Christ. But now, the time had come for a change of procedure. And for two reasons. On the one hand, His disciples were in a state of great excitement and agitation. They were anticipating that the kingdom of God would immediately appear, and visions of earthly glory, of honour, and dignities and wealth and power, of sitting at their Master's right hand and at His left, were rising up before them. For these men, then, His triumphant entry into Jerusalem was at once a concession and a protest. "I am a King, it is true"—we may suppose Jesus saying—"but not such a king as you expect. My kingdom is not of this world. And to show you its real character, I come lowly and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." On the other hand, to the nation at large His entry had a different significance. Up to the present moment they (as represented by the men of position and the leaders of religious thought) had rejected Him. But this rejection His love forbade Him to regard as absolutely final. He would make another attempt to save them. Possibly, if He came into the Royal City with a distinct announcement of Himself as their King—they might be induced to recognise His claim. They were men who knew the Scriptures. It was conceivable, then, that the ancient prophecy of Zechariah, now being fulfilled before their very eyes, would occur to them; and that thus, the conviction that they were indeed looking upon Him of whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets did write, should force itself in upon their minds. At any rate—the

thing should be done. And accordingly, the Lord Jesus, departing from His usual custom, entered the walls of the city in a kind of lowly triumph, in order to ascertain whether Jerusalem would or would not at last "know the day of her visitation."

Now, the thought which the narrative suggests is this—that, whenever Jesus enters into the life of men, and comes distinctly before them—it is impossible for them to pass the subject by with absolute indifference, but that they are compelled to make inquiry about Him. In other words, the question of our text is sure to be asked, wherever the Gospel is preached, although the spirit in which it is asked may be different in different cases. Here we have the thought which I am anxious to be permitted to commend to your consideration in the present discourse.

I.—The spirit (I say) differs. In the mouths of some people the question is one of a simple curiosity. It can hardly be disputed that the most remarkable figure in human history is that of Jesus of Nazareth. There have been conquerors and statesmen, and men characterised by force of will, or force of thought—who have stamped, as it were, their image and superscription upon the face of society, and changed for good or evil the destinies of multitudes of their fellow-men. But, after all, their influence has been only limited and partial. The thinkers have reached one class, but failed to reach the others. The men of power have sent forth their armies, or their laws, over a portion of the globe, but there have been vast tracts of population where their name has not been so much as whispered; and in all cases, only the surface of human life and human society has been touched at all. But the influence of Jesus of Nazareth is of an en-

tirely different character from this. It matters not in what century, or to what race, or to what class or rank His story is told—invariably He draws round Him the choicest portion of mankind. His emblem is the Cross (a symbol of degradation and shame), and yet His followers are to be counted by the million ; and the races which are now the foremost in the van of human progress, and hold in their hands the promise of the world's future—are those which name themselves by the name of Christ, and in which the value and the force of Christianity are most profoundly felt. Now, to a certain class of minds, all this is a subject of interesting and attractive speculation ; but it is little more. They have a certain phenomenon before them, and they occupy themselves with investigating its nature. What is the cause—they ask—of the undeniable influence of Jesus Christ? How is it that He has made Himself so completely the Master of human souls that thousands upon thousands of men and women would be willing to die for one whom they have never seen? What is He—Man? or God-man? as others tell us. And what is the meaning of that strange, supernatural life, which He claims to infuse into His followers, and which they, on their part, believe themselves to have received from Him? Is it a delusion? or is it a reality? These, brethren, and many other topics like these, are discussed by men, who seem never to have entertained the idea that they themselves are in any way concerned in the results of their investigation ; who have never suspected, so far as appears, that there is any real relation between them and the object of their somewhat supercilious intellectual scrutiny. Such persons, I say—when they ask the question of our text, “Who

is this?"—are prompted, simply and solely, by a spirit of curiosity.

But there are others who ask the question under the influence of another motive—the motive of dislike. "Who is this that assumes so much? that claims the disposal of our persons, ay, and the control of our very thoughts? Who gave Him this authority? and by what right does He presume thus to lord it over us?"

And such was the feeling of not a few of those who witnessed the entry of the Saviour into Jerusalem. The ruling ecclesiastical party of the day, if at first they thought Jesus a harmless enthusiast, soon began to entertain very serious misgivings about Him; and, under the influence of these misgivings, sent deputations from headquarters to watch His movements, and to take down His discourses, and to report upon all that was going on in Galilee. The reports received only served to intensify their suspicion and dislike. And as time passed on, and the teachings of Jesus became better understood, and the purpose and aim of His ministry emerged more distinctly to the view, it was apparent enough that there was an irreconcilable antagonism between Him and the religious leaders of the nation; and that the one party could only succeed in holding its ground by the overthrow and destruction of the other. What this led to you very well know. It led to the Cross of Calvary; and the first deep mutterings of the coming storm were heard in the streets of the Holy City, when the scribes and Pharisees—as Jesus passed along calmly on the ass's colt—asked, "Who is this that permits Himself to be saluted as the King that cometh in the name of the Lord?"

And shall I be mistaken, brethren, if I say that a feeling

about Jesus Christ, very closely akin to this ancient dislike, may be found in certain quarters amongst ourselves in the present day? Men sometimes entertain a sort of resentment against the Saviour on account of the exacting nature of the demands which He makes. It is this resentment which keeps them hovering on the outside fringe of the Christian Church, not daring altogether to break with Christ, to renounce His allegiance, and to cast off His yoke, and yet, on the other hand, not willing to render that entire and unreserving submission with which alone He will be satisfied. If He would only be more lenient and easy-going, they would (they think) devote themselves to His service without a great amount of difficulty. There is much that they like and admire and respect about the Gospel. But Jesus puts His hand upon everything, and claims it for His own. He intrudes Himself into the place of business, the warehouse, the bank, and requires that He should be taken into account in every bargain that is made, in every statement, in every transaction, in every arrangement. He comes to our dinner tables and our drawing rooms, and will not consent to be forgotten even there. He will have a voice in our selection of books and of companions. He exercises supervision over the expenditure of our money and the occupation of our time; in fact, there is no single department of our life—no, nor is there any nook or corner of any department of our life into which His authority does not extend, and where He does not make His influence felt. And it is this apparent tyranny, I am persuaded, which alienates some men, at least, from Christ. There is much about Him that attracts, but there is this that repels. We say to ourselves, "If this absolute, this unhesitating sub-

mission, be the one condition of discipleship, then I must remodel my life before I can become a disciple, I must run on new lines, and I must build upon another foundation—and this I am not prepared to do.” Or, to phrase it in other words, there are cases in which the question—“Who is this?”—is a question implying recoil from the Saviour’s demands, and in virtual, if not an avowed, resistance to the authority which He claims to exercise over the children of men.

III.—In the third place, the question of our text is one which is frequently prompted by an earnest desire to know more about the Lord Jesus Christ. It was so, I doubt not, in the crowd that stood round the procession as it wound its way through the streets of Jerusalem. There were men there who could be called “devout men,” who had come to the city from distant countries for the purpose of offering up holy worship in the place which the Lord had chosen as a habitation for Himself to dwell in. Of these, it may be supposed that their many personal failures to live up to the standard of a covenant-position had made them long for some higher help, for some greater blessedness; it may be supposed that their acquaintance with the writings of the prophets had led them to anticipate the speedy advent of Him who was the hope and the expectation of His people Israel. In their case then, the question, “Who is this?” would not be one of a lazy and indifferent curiosity, much less one of an incipient suspicion and dislike; but it would be the outcome of a true wish to be more deeply taught of God, and to understand more clearly the things which concerned their everlasting peace. And so, brethren, in the present day. It may be confidently affirmed that there are,

everywhere, not a few who may be said to be asking the question of our text, because they are desiring and seeking a deeper acquaintance with the Lord Jesus Christ. I think it is so with ourselves. Knowledge about Christ we have, of course; for we have heard about Him from our childhood. The mystery of His person—uniting as it does, in an eternal alliance, the divine and the human natures; the wonders of His work, His life, His death upon the Cross—with all its profound sacrificial significance; His glorious resurrection from the grave; His ascension into heaven, and session at the right hand of the Father; His mediatorial kingdom now, and His coming again to earth—all these are facts with which we are all well acquainted, and have been well acquainted for long.

But do we not feel that the knowledge requires to be filled out, as it were, and made a living thing? a thing that shall enter into and influence, and mould, and colour, and tinge every action and thought of our every-day life? Too often it lies quiet in our minds—effecting nothing. What is to be desired is that it should be touched by the Spirit of God, and rise up, and stand upon its feet; and act so that the Lord Jesus Christ should become more and more a living Person and a real presence to us; so that our communion with Him, and our realisation of Him, shall be in the future true and real, to a degree which we feel it has not been in the past.

We do not—we cannot—take in the glory of Christ all at once. The subject is too vast; and our faculties are too poor and feeble. But we can take in more and more and more, as time goes on. I have been told that the first feeling of those who visit that magnificent Cathedral—

the Church of St. Peter's at Rome—is (in most cases, at least) one of disappointment. “Is this all?”—the traveller says—“Is this the building so much talked about? so eagerly discussed? so lavishly praised?” But the fault, brethren, is not in the building—it is in the beholder himself. It requires an education of the eye and of the taste to enable him to enter into the meaning of what he sees before him. And not till after he has become habituated to the vastness, to the proportions, to the arrangements of the mighty structure—is he at all competent to grasp the scene as a whole, to comprehend its breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and even then, he cannot but feel that, though much is known, there is much more behind that he has failed to understand, and has even failed to discover. Of course, I would not say that the first sight of Jesus Christ—the sight, I mean, by which we recognise Him as our own, as one who has entered into close personal relations with us—I would not venture to say that that is disappointing. It is not. But this is certainly true, that when we have crossed the threshold of the building—and that is the first step to be taken—we have yet to understand the building itself. We have to be spiritually educated to discern the greatness of the Incarnate Son of God. And what we aim at, what we desire, is, that the vision of the Glory of Christ should so rise upon our view, through the Spirit's teaching in the Written Word, through the Spirit's teaching in the discipline of life, through the Spirit's teaching in our contemplation of Christ's work in the world at large—that the light of heaven may fall upon the path which we are treading here below, and that the things of our common, ordinary, every-day existence may be trans-

figured by the touch of a radiance and a glow from the courts of the eternal Sanctuary above.

We have thus, as you observe, discussed the parallel which may, we think, be rightly instituted between the past and the present; we have discovered that the question "Who is this?" is still asked about Jesus of Nazareth—asked sometimes in a spirit of calm intellectual inquiry; and sometimes in a spirit of hostility; and sometimes, and not unfrequently we trust, in a spirit of eager desire to know and to advance in the knowledge of the truths of God.

To make the subject complete—there is yet another part of the parallel to which I must just allude before I close. Christ came to the Jewish nation in lowliness and humility, offering Himself for their acceptance as their King. They rejected Him. He will come again, but this time not in humility, but in judgment—bringing with Him not gentleness and peace, but all the horrors of the Roman invasion and the destruction of Jerusalem. And is it not so with the individual? with the Church of the present time? Christ comes to you and me, brethren, in great humility. Crowned Monarch as He is, He knocks at the door of our hearts, beseeching us to admit Him. He waits, and is patient. He entreats us to have mercy upon ourselves. Now we can, if we choose, resist Him. We can, if we choose, turn a deaf ear to His invitations, and keep Him outside our hearts and lives. Like Jerusalem of old—we have it in our power to overstay the day of visitation, to let it pass by unimproved, and so to find ourselves at last hopelessly entangled in the horrors of the Day of Judgment. What are the consequences of delay, I dare not enlarge upon. This only I will allow myself to say—that, though God is merciful to the sins of men, there is one sin which He will never, and can never, consent to forgive—and that is the sin of the wilful rejection of Jesus Christ the Son of His love.

XXVII.

SIX MANIFESTATIONS OF CHRIST.

“The Son of God was manifested.”—1 JOHN iii. 8 (part).

WE are just passing away from the season of Epiphany. Before we lose sight of it altogether, perhaps it may be well to gather up and present at one view the general teaching of the season, so as to impress it more deeply upon our minds. Our theme then, for this morning, shall be—the Epiphanies of the Lord Jesus Christ; and I will touch upon six of them as fully as my limits will allow.

I.—Now, the word Epiphany, brethren, means (as you know) “manifestation,” or “showing.” And the idea suggested by the word is this—that what had been held back, or concealed for a certain period, is, at the expiration of that period, produced or exhibited in such a way as to be brought within the reach of observation and scrutiny. We have an exemplification of the idea in the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. For century after century, the world had been prepared for the advent of a Deliverer. Light had been poured in upon the subject from various quarters; expectations had been raised—but no deliverer had appeared; until at last, when the “fulness of time” had come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, not only to redeem them that were under the law,

but also to accomplish His wonderful purposes for the human race. How this event took place, we all of us know. In a manger-trough of the caravanserai at Bethlehem, a Jewish girl—who had arrived in the afternoon, weary and travel-worn, leaning heavily on her husband's arm—laid at night her newly-born infant, because she could find no better and more suitable cradle for Him. Nobody took much notice. There was nothing strange or remarkable about the addition of one more unit to the great mass of mankind. But, to those who did understand (and they at the moment were the angels in heaven, and they alone), the circumstance was the most absolutely astounding that had ever occurred—for the child lying in that rude bed was no less than God manifest in the flesh. And how was the manifestation made? In this wise. It happened that on the heights above the little town a band of shepherds were keeping watch by night over their flocks, to protect them from robbers, or from prowling beasts of prey. These shepherds were godly men, who looked for the redemption of Israel; and it may be they were conversing together on high religious themes; or else, wrapt in their rough cloaks, were gazing up into the dark depths of the midnight sky, with its glorious constellations wheeling majestically over their heads. Suddenly, there burst into the sky the bright figure of an angel, who announced to them the birth, in the city of David, of a Saviour, which was Christ the Lord. And when he had done speaking, as suddenly there flashed round him the forms of a multitude of his celestial associates, who sang, in tones the sweetness of which must have dwelt for ever in the memories of the listeners, the first Christmas carol—"Glory to God in the highest: and on

earth peace, good will toward men." It was not long before the angels returned into heaven, and then the shepherds, recovering from their surprise, took courage and went to Bethlehem, and found that what had been told them was true. The child—the centre of all prophecies from the beginning of time; the fulfilment of the hopes of the Jewish race; the desire of all nations, who were dimly and uncertainly groping after the light—the divine child lay there before them; and they blessed God that their eyes had been permitted to behold the sight. This, brethren, may be called the first Epiphany—the manifestation of Christ to His own covenant people—the people of Israel.

II.—Some months pass—perhaps eighteen—when, one day, a strange procession is seen entering the little village of Bethlehem. The men who form the principal part of it are obviously persons of wealth and influence, but foreigners from a far country. They have come, it seems, from Persia. In their own land they are philosophers and scientific men, statesmen and politicians, high in rank and in the estimation of their sovereign and their country. More than this, they are sincere seekers after God, and God has rewarded them by sending a star—*i.e.*, a luminous meteor floating in the heavens—to announce to them the birth of the King of the Jews. At first, perhaps, the Magi—for so we may call them—did not quite understand the meaning of the sign; but presently, gathering that they are directed by it to pay their homage to the infant Monarch, they determine to undertake a journey into the land of Israel. The star, it is true, has disappeared; nevertheless, they set out. Undeterred by the length and the difficulty of the way—they press on over mountain, and plain, and river, and desert, until at

last they enter the holy city of Jerusalem. Undeterred when there by the general ignorance and apathy about the new-born King, they pass out at the walls of the city in the direction of Bethlehem; and they have not gone far, when their hearts are gladdened by the re-appearance of the star which had first visited them in their far-off Persian home. It floats on before them, marshalling their way; and when it rests and hangs over a little dwelling in the outskirts of the town, they know that their long and laborious quest is ended. "But will they not be daunted," we say "by the mean and insignificant circumstances in which they find the child placed?" The house is not a palace, nor even the abode of a nobleman—but only a humble cottage. The mother is not a princess, but only a young woman of the peasant class. Joseph is a carpenter, and the tools of his trade and the materials of his work are lying round about him. There is no grandeur, no power, no magnificence, no indication of future greatness whatever to be seen. But the men are satisfied. God, they feel, has led them there Himself, and pointed out to them the Monarch to whom their allegiance is due. And they fall down and worship the child; and opening caskets which they have brought with them, present unto Him gifts—gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. This, brethren, is what is commonly called the Epiphany—the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles. You observe the difference. The first manifestation was to the Jews; the second, to the Gentiles. And the inference to be drawn is this—that He is equally the Saviour, and the King, and the Friend of both.

III.—We shift the scene. Twelve years have passed away

since the earliest Epiphany took place, and we are now in the Temple at Jerusalem. The Lord Jesus is there—a fine-looking, well-grown lad, with a striking cast of countenance. It is His first visit to the city. His parents have been in the habit of travelling from Galilee to keep the Feast of the Passover; but, apparently, they have up to the present time left Jesus behind them at home. On this occasion they bring Him with them. And with what deep thoughts the lad gazes on the Temple, watches the sacrifices, takes His part in the prayers and the hymns, mingles with the processions; and what strange, mysterious feelings begin to stir in His breast—we may well be left to imagine for ourselves. For some time past, we suppose, He has had presentiments, undefined at first, but gradually growing in clearness, about a more than human origin that He can claim as His own. He has begun to feel that He stands in a special, an unique, relation to the great God and Father of all; that He is not a son in the ordinary sense of sonship, but something higher and nobler far. And these feelings, fostered—it may be—by hints that have every now and then dropped from His mother with regard to the supernatural circumstances of His birth, have prepared Him for the revelation of a divine origin which is now to burst in its fulness upon Him. Does it seem to you strange that Jesus should not have known all this before? Consider for a moment. Could the child Jesus in His cradle, could the boy Jesus at His books or His play, have been acquainted with all the facts of the universe, even with all the truth which lay exposed to the eye of older men? If He could, He would not have been a true member of the human family, but something

totally different from us, for whom, as we are all aware, it is a necessity that knowledge should be attained to by degrees. But the sacred writer settles the matter for us. He tells us that Jesus "increased in wisdom." What does that mean, if it does not mean that Jesus Christ, at one period of His earthly life, knew things which He did not know at another? Does it mean that Jesus knew as God, but did not know as man? That were a simple impossibility. It means, then, or, at all events, it leads inevitably to the inference—that, when the Son of God, for our salvation, condescended to unite Himself with human nature, and to become really one of us, He subjected Himself to the limitations of humanity, so that He not only felt as we feel, suffered as we suffer, willed as we will, but also became acquainted with things—with God, with man, with the objects in the world round Him, with truth generally—precisely in the same way as we do, *i.e.*, by the gradual process of learning, but, in His case, under the absolutely perfect direction of the Holy Spirit, who was the Creator of His bodily frame, and the Author of His human soul. There is nothing irreverent, then, in predicating ignorance of the Lord Jesus Christ in the period of His earthly humiliation. Why, what does He say Himself about Himself? "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man ; no, not the angels which are in heaven—*neither the Son.*"

But, brethren, it would be irreverent, and unscriptural, and false in the highest degree—to suppose that Jesus could be capable of mistake. He might be in nescience (I mean, when upon earth) at one particular moment. He says so, as we have just seen ; but He could not be in error. And if ever, at any time, He makes an assertion, we are under

the deepest obligation to believe it to be absolutely and unalterably true. "Heaven and earth shall pass away; but My words shall not pass away." And now you see, I doubt not, to what all this arguing leads. If there were facts with which Jesus was not acquainted at one time, but became acquainted with at another—one of these facts might very well be, the mystery of His relation to the unseen Father in heaven. And the moment, when we may believe the conviction of His divine sonship to have flashed in upon Him, and taken possession of Him—was that, of which the Evangelist speaks in the second chapter of his Gospel, when he describes the wondrous boy as saying to His parents—"How is it that ye sought Me? Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" *Then* it was, we believe, that Jesus came to know distinctly that He was the eternal Son of the eternal Father. And if so, we may rightly speak of this incident as "the manifestation of Jesus Christ to Himself." But it is quite conceivable that, although Jesus knew at the time of what is called the "finding in the Temple" that He had a mission from God—the exact nature and character of that mission might not have been yet fully revealed to Him. The mind of the lad (do not forget, I pray you, the Saviour's real humanity) might not have been able to bear a burden of thought that might properly be laid upon the full-grown man. So, there comes a fourth Epiphany. And this took place on the banks of the river Jordan.

IV.—John the Baptist had drawn multitudes after him, by the energy of his preaching, to a place called Bethabara, or Bethany, and there he baptized them unto repentance—announcing, at the same time, that he was merely the fore-

runner of a far greater personage than himself, who should baptize with the Holy Ghost. Whilst he was thus engaged, Jesus approached—offering Himself for baptism. Now, the two cousins had never met, we suppose, since the time of the “finding in the Temple.” After that event Jesus had returned to the quiet and obscurity of His Nazareth home ; and John, disgusted and disheartened by what he saw of the religious condition of Jerusalem, had withdrawn into the wilderness to lead a life of lonely meditation and communion with God. But though they had never met, John had heard of Jesus ; had heard of His sanctity ; had heard of the circumstances of His birth ; and it is probable enough that a suspicion not unfrequently crossed his mind that here—amongst them—was the Messiah, He of whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets did write. This suspicion deepened when Jesus came to him at Bethabara ; it ripened into certainty when, as Jesus issued from the waters of the river, the heavens were ‘cleft asunder above Him, and a fiery symbol—with a hovering motion like a dove—descended, and lighted upon Him, and the voice of the Father was heard—“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” John is now furnished with the means of bearing his testimony—the special purpose for which he was sent. “Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining upon Him, the same is He that baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And he sees, and bears record that this is the Son of God.” Here, brethren—in this incident—we have what we may call “the manifestation of Jesus to John the Baptist.”

But this manifestation, unless I am much mistaken, answered a twofold purpose. It informed John, but it also

opened to the view of Jesus the true nature, the dignity and the terror (if I may so say) of the mission for God and for man to which He had been called. The Messianic responsibility rose up distinctly before Him. More than this. At the baptism by Jordan, Jesus received—besides the clear understanding of His future work—an anointing of the Holy Ghost to prepare and equip Him for the work. “God” (says St. Peter) “anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power.” And from henceforth, Jesus was able to enforce His statements and teaching by the performance of miraculous acts. The opportunity soon came when His newly-bestowed powers were displayed. And here we arrive at the fifth Epiphany of the Lord Jesus Christ.

V.—He has been invited, He and His disciples, to a marriage feast, in a little Galilean village, called Cana. The guests are numerous, and the simple, unmedicated wine of the country provided for their entertainment begins (through some miscalculation, or other mismanagement) to run short. The position of the newly-married couple is an embarrassing one, and Jesus is appealed to by His mother to extricate them from the difficulty. With further details of the narrative, I need not trouble you. Suffice it to say that six large stone jars—which stand probably in a row against the wall of the room in which the feast is going on, and which are capable of holding, each of them, eighteen gallons of liquid—are filled with water; and when the water is drawn out by the attendants, it is found to be wine of the best and purest quality. This miracle—or, more correctly speaking, “sign” (for so St. John calls it), the sign of Christ’s character, of His mission, of the nature of the work which He was to

accomplish in the world—arrested the attention of His disciples, and filled them with astonishment. It was the first that He had wrought before them. Indeed, it was the first that they had ever seen. They rose at once to higher views of the Master, to whose service they had attached themselves. Their confidence in Him was increased. They had believed on Him before; they believed on Him more fully and more unreservedly now. And here we have what we may call the Epiphany of Christ in His wonder-working power—to His followers and disciples.

VI.—There is yet one more topic remaining to be considered. We have seen, brethren, that there was a “fulness of time,” at which, when it had arrived, God sent forth His Son into the world. Now Christ, who came to us, hath gone away from us. He has withdrawn into the heavens. “They have received Him until the restitution of all things,” and we are looking for another “fulness of time” to arrive—when He shall again appear for the deliverance of His people. It is this appearing which St. Paul calls the manifestation of the sons of God. You will remember the passage? Touchingly the apostle describes the whole suffering and groaning creation as waiting, with eager looks and outstretched necks, for the coming of the event, which is to lift off the curse that rests heavily upon it now. Christ, then, is yet to appear. But with a difference. Before, He came in humility; now, He has to come in the magnificence and awfulness of His mediatorial throne. Before, He came alone; now, He is to come attended by the myriads of His people whom He has redeemed from the earth by His blood, and sanctified by His indwelling Spirit. It will be the Day of Resurrection; and we (if we

are His) shall surround Him in all the beauty and power of the resurrection-body. "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear—then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." This will be the final, the consummating Epiphany, or manifestation, in which God grant that we may all of us be found taking our part—through the grace and the mercy and the merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.



XXVIII.

THE WORD OF GOD.

“Thy testimonies are wonderful : therefore doth my soul keep them.”

PSALM cxix. 129.

WHEN reading the one hundred and nineteenth Psalm we are struck—first, with the frequent recurrence of the mention of Holy Scripture in it, and then, with the intense devotion to the study of Scripture evinced by the sacred writer ; for in almost every verse—in all but two—the Scriptures are mentioned. The writer varies his phrase, of course. He speaks of the Book as “word,” or “precepts,” or “statutes,” or “testimonies,” or “commandments,” or “law,” his intention being obviously to present the one subject from different points of view, in order that we may be able to take in the better the whole extent of the grandeur and the loveliness of it ; and he seems unable, as it were, to tear himself away from the contemplation. And, as to his expressions of pleasure, you will easily recall some of them. “The law of Thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.” “Oh ! how love I Thy law !” “How sweet are Thy words to my taste : yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth.” These expressions, and such as these, testify to the extreme delight which he felt when engaged in the careful and diligent

perusal of the sacred volume. And the wonder of all this—if wonder it is—is enhanced by the fact, that the Psalmist had in his hands, at the time, a very limited portion of that Revelation which God has seen fit to make to us of Himself in the pages of the written Word. There was no “Life of Christ” in his day; no history of the progress of the Christian Church; none of the mystic figures and descriptions by which the beloved disciple lifts up for us a corner of the curtain, and shows us the future; no! nor were there even any of the glowing visions, or solemn denunciations of the ancient prophets. The writer’s gaze rested upon a very contracted area, and that area overspread with all the indistinctness of type and symbol. What would he have thought, and what would he have said had he been privileged, as you and I are, to gaze with open eyes upon the grand fulfilment of prophetic utterance; to behold the King in His beauty, and to catch glimpses of the lofty battlements, and pearly gates, and golden walls, of the eternal city—the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God?

With these few words of introduction I propose to consider with you our long-deferred subject—that of Holy Scripture—which was to have been brought before you on the second Sunday in Advent. My desire is to handle just a little corner of the subject, and to discuss with you some of what are called the “internal evidences” of Holy Scripture; those proofs (that is) of the truth of its divine character, which might be supposed to strike an intelligent and unprejudiced reader. There will be nothing pretentious about my sermon. I mean simply to suggest, and to work a little in detail thoughts which have probably occurred

to most of those who are now listening to me. My plan will embrace four points ; but I will not trouble you with a formal announcement of them. Each shall be named when its predecessor has been dismissed, and when it shall thereby have become entitled to advance in its turn to the front.

I.—I would ask you, then, to notice in the first place, *the air of sincerity that pervades the entire volume*. Of sincerity we are able to judge by a sort of instinct. In our intercourse with the world, we soon form our opinion about the character of the persons with whom we come into contact. Probably most of us grown-up people have lived long enough to distrust a tale which flows on very smoothly, every part of which is so skilfully adjusted to every other part, that there seems no room whatever for misgivings, or for difficulties of belief of any kind to enter in. About such tales, and about the persons who tell them, there is an absence of naturalness, which has the effect of making us suspicious. We doubt, because everything is studied. It occurs to us that the excess of elaboration implies a consciousness of fraud on the part of the narrator, and an endeavour to guard himself in every movement against the possibilities of detection and exposure. But, on the other hand, we frequently meet with persons, whose manner conveys to us the almost irresistible conviction of their being genuine and true. They may not be particularly plausible. They may even blunder and halt in some of their statements. But, for all that, we feel sure that there is in them no intention to deceive, and that what we are listening to are the accents of truth, if not the accents of absolute and immaculate accuracy. Now, what

holds good with regard to persons, holds good also with regard to books. And I venture to assert, on behalf of the book which we call the "Bible," that if any one comes to its perusal in an impartial spirit, without prejudice, without a previously-formed determination to dislike and controvert it, he will inevitably arrive at the conclusion that, amongst its leading characteristics are simplicity and truth. Obviously, the writers believe every word they say. They are not chiefly concerned with making you give credence to them; you may believe or not, as you choose; but the facts are as they narrate them, and their business is to give a true account. This they do. Are the facts such as are open to misinterpretation? Still, they give them. Ay, and even in narrations, in which they might be expected to express some sort of emotion—such, for instance, as those which treat of the ill-usage and sufferings of the blessed Lord at the hands of His enemies—even there, their own feelings are sternly repressed, and they step on from event to event, without a word of note or comment, as if their sole object was to tell the tale in the simplest way, and with as little circumlocution as possible. In other words, the Bible is encompassed with an atmosphere of reality, and you cannot doubt its truthfulness, although you may, if you like, dispute or question the accuracy of its statements and the worth of its doctrines. It gives you (if you are honest yourself, and so capable of judging) the impression of transparent honesty; and although this impression is not sufficient, of course, to convince you of its divine origin, it is sufficient to prepare the way for the more solid and substantial arguments which may afterwards follow.

II.—In the second place, it may be well to observe, *that*

the sacred book is an organic whole—pervaded by one spirit and animated by one life. You will understand better what I mean, brethren, if you will let me employ a very simple illustration. You have on your book-shelves at home (we will say) most of the writers of one particular period—our own Elizabethan period, for instance. Look at these writers. You see that they are tinged with one colour. You observe that there is a somewhat similar strain of thought running through them all; that they are stamped with a peculiar character—a sort of family likeness—which makes them different from the writers of any preceding or any succeeding age, and in consequence of this peculiarity, you know how to recognise an Elizabethan author at once whenever you meet with him. But although the books on your shelves are similar—similar in tone, in thought, in diction, in manner—you cannot say of them, as you look at them, that they form a connected whole; or, to express myself differently, that they are the various limbs of a body, each occupying its own place, and accomplishing its own work in its own peculiar way. But this is precisely what you *can* say about the Bible. The composition of the Book—or rather of the books (for there are between sixty and seventy of them)—extends over a period of about fifteen hundred years—a millennium and a half. The writers are many and diverse. There are lawgivers, and kings, and priests, and prophets; there is one at least from amongst the lowest ranks of society—a man who was a herdsman, and gatherer of sycamore-fruit. There are Jewish fishermen, and a Jewish taxgatherer. There is a Gentile physician, and a Pharisee of the Pharisees—the once persecutor, Saul of Tarsus. They write chiefly to meet an immediate

necessity, and in nearly all cases, without any reference to each other. Moses, for instance, lays down laws necessary for the moment for the guidance of the people, whom he is bringing up out of Egypt. A prophet, witnessing some flagrant outrage on the part of the upper classes, or some wanton act of idolatry on the part of the people, blazes out into fierce and indignant denunciation. David is overwhelmed with sorrow, or elated with joy; and he takes down his harp, and gives expression to his feelings in a Psalm. The writers of narrative tell their story quietly and simply, just as it is required of them. Paul indites a letter to combat a heresy, or to rectify some practical disorders which have crept into a Christian Church, or to direct his younger brethren in their ministerial duties. Everything is simple, natural, unforced, spontaneous—the outcome of the circumstances of the moment. Well, but with all this dissimilarity of character, and with all these distances of time, and with all these varieties of authorship—the Book is still a whole. It has one plan and purpose throughout—one object in view from first to last. It converges towards one point; or, to repeat what I said a moment or two ago, it is animated by one spirit, and pervaded by one life. Now, is there not something very noticeable about this? You have, we will say, sixty or seventy locks put before you—some of them of antique, others of more modern fashion; some of more complicated, others of more simple manufacture; but all different, all constructed by different makers, and at different periods (it being also clear that, in the great majority of cases, the makers could have had no knowledge whatever of each other's handiwork), and you find that one single key unlocks them all. It is certainly a remarkable

fact, and you can hardly help accepting the conclusion that, somehow or other, a single person was concerned in the production, or at least in controlling the production, of the pieces of mechanism. And such is the impression produced upon an intelligent reader of the Bible. Through all the diversity, he detects one hand laid upon the volume—one mind occupied in guiding and directing, and arranging and adjusting, and developing—and thus bringing about a certain foreseen and pre-determined result.

III.—We may notice, in the third place, what perhaps I may venture to call, *the broad humanity of the Book*. Go into your library again. You have shelves, on which scientific treatises rest. These volumes will not suit your little children. You have other shelves, filled with picture-books and fairy tales. These will not suit you. In fact, your books are classified; and each reader, if your library be extensive enough, finds that which accommodates itself to his requirements, or meets his fancy. But this Book, of which I now speak, suits every age and every character, every condition of life and every phase of feeling, through which we may be called upon to pass. It comes to you in your childhood, winning your heart with its simple and artless narratives; in your youth, firing you with the thought of following the ideal man, the perfect leader—Jesus Christ—and of helping Him to establish the kingdom of righteousness and truth upon earth. In your advancing years, when cares and burdens and anxieties multiply upon you, and press you down, it whispers peace and strength; and as time goes on, and the end draws nigh, and you can almost hear the splash of the waters of death on the chilly shore, it throws forth a gleam upon you from the open

portals of heaven, and shows you the blessed company of happy spirits and angels that are awaiting your arrival at the other side of the stream. Are you poor? It reveals to you the eternal riches. Are you rich? It warns you of the dangers that beset you, and shows you the right way. Are you sad? It comforts you. Are you bright and cheerful? It sanctifies your joy, and makes it a joy in the Lord. It brings a message to all—to high and low, to learned and unlearned, to wise and unwise. It suits itself to every race, and every nation, and every age. Born in the East—it makes its home in every part of the habitable globe. The savage and the negro, as well as the civilised nations of the earth; the inhabitants of the frozen North, as well as those who swelter beneath a tropical sun, find that it speaks to their heart, and touches and arouses the better nature within them. In fact, it is the common property of the human race.

I ask you then, brethren, to notice well this wondrous adaptation of the Book to man as man, and to all the varieties of circumstances in which man may be placed. I am always reminded, when I think of this subject, of the tree described in the last chapter of the Revelation of St. John—that tree whose roots are fed by the bright, full-flowing waters of the river of life; which bears on its branches “twelve manner” of fruits, to meet every need, and to suit every taste; that tree for which there is no winter, and whose fruit never fails, for it yields its fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

IV.—My fourth and last thought is this. I will express it, as well as I can, in the language of a well-known French

writer, no friend to Revelation—"That such men as the Evangelists should have portrayed such a character as that of Jesus Christ, had there been no such person, would have been a greater marvel than the marvel of the character itself." And the writer, brethren, never said a truer thing in his life. If the sacred historians are not merely, as we believe them to be, reporters—telling us what they saw and heard, but are, to a great extent at least, inventors—how will you account for the conception of such a character as Jesus of Nazareth? Why, it was not in the men—it could not be in the men—to imagine such a person! Sinful men—they have portrayed absolute purity and perfection; men making no claim to the creative power of genius—they have depicted God manifest in the flesh! Jews, encompassed and crippled by all the limitations of their race, and education, and prejudices, they have put before us a Christ for men—a Christ for every clime and every age—a Christ for humanity!

And again, although they view the great subject from different standpoints, they agree in their tale. Matthew, for instance, the taxgatherer, advances and says to us, "come and see." And we behold the Jewish King, the Messiah, predicted in the Law and in the Prophets, but the Messiah who must bear the Cross before He wins the Crown; the King who must toil up to the steps of His throne by the blood-stained pathway of suffering and death. And then Mark comes forward, the man with the graphic pencil—and he too says, "come and see." And there appears the Servant of Jehovah, the Elect in whom His soul delighteth, engaged in fulfilling His will, and accomplishing the great work of Redemption. And then Luke, the man of culture,

and of measured periods, the Gentile physician—he too says to us, “come and see.” And we, standing by his side, recognise the Saviour of men, the sympathiser with human sorrow, the teacher and creator of human brotherhood, the tender, loving, great High Priest, who cannot but be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, because He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. And last of all, we behold, bent and white with age, the beloved Apostle ; and he, too, when all the others have passed away into the silent land, cries to us, “come and see.” And we come, and see. And what do we see? God manifest in the flesh! The eternal Son of the eternal Father! The greatest and most magnificent revelation of all! These are only different sides of the one great figure. The figure throughout is the same. And do you not feel, brethren, when you read the Gospels—do you not feel inclined to put the question to some persons you know: “If you find it difficult to believe in the story of the marvels, how is it you are not convinced by the marvel of the story?”

I have thus fulfilled my promise, and given you my four points. But permit me, before I close, to make a simple suggestion. It is very simple—almost homely—but it may be of use to some of you younger people. *If you wish to believe in your Bible, make yourselves acquainted with it.* It is, I am persuaded, because people do not really know the Word of God ; because they have not really used it ; because they have not made it the man of their counsel, the lamp of their feet, their weapon of defence, the food of their soul—in fact, it is because they are not really acquainted with it, that they lie at the mercy of any clever disputant, who makes it his business to rail at Revelation. But if you

know your Bible, you can deal with objectors as you would with a man who endeavoured to undermine your confidence in your father. The man comes with a plausible tale. He mentions dates, and places, and circumstances ; and you, at the moment, are not prepared with a reply, though you are persuaded—are indeed certain—from your acquaintance with your parent's integrity, that the whole thing is a fabrication. What do you do? Do you say: "Well, I must think about it." "Well, perhaps there is some truth in what you tell me." Nothing of the kind. You thunder out: "I know my father; and I know that you are saying what is false." Be in a position to say so—more politely, of course—but as decidedly, to those who impugn the veracity, or in any way strive to undermine the authority of the Word of the living God, the Word of your Father which is in heaven.



XXIX.

THE PEACE OF GOD.

“The peace of God shall keep your hearts and minds.”

PHILIPPIANS iv. 7.

THESE seem to be two senses in which Holy Scripture uses the expression, “peace with God,” or rather, “having peace with God.” Let me endeavour to explain. The unconverted, unspiritual man is really a rebel, though perhaps without knowing it. He resists the divine authority, and stands in the ranks of the enemies of God ; he is then, I say, a rebel ; and whilst he remains such, the two—God and he—are contrary, and cannot but be contrary the one to the other. There is war, so to speak, between them ; for on the one hand the carnal mind is enmity against God, as St. Paul says ; and on the other, God is “a consuming fire” to all that opposes itself to the divine nature, as says the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews. When this state of things comes to an end (as, happily, it often does), and the man submits his will to God’s will, and accepts the divine terms of reconciliation, then—there is peace.

But it is quite conceivable that this condition of peace or reconcilment may exist, and yet not be perfectly realised. If we are rescued by a life-boat from a wreck, we may be

safe enough, and yet in our inexperience of the sea, and in the excitement caused by the danger from which we have just escaped—the tossing of the waves and the howling of the storm may rob us of the feeling of security, and our alarm may be almost as great as when we stood on the slippery deck of the sinking vessel before the life-boat had taken us off. And, in the same way—although the antagonism between God and our souls may have unquestionably terminated ; and although God, of course, knows what has taken place in the inner recesses of our spirit, we ourselves may not know, or, at least, may not know for certain, and doubts and misgivings may spring up in our minds ; sometimes we may be confident, sometimes we may almost despair ; and when this is the case, our mental condition is very far from being that which the Lord Jesus Christ purposes and intends for the people who put their trust in Him. There is needed, then, as you see, not only the reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ, but also the knowledge of that reconciliation ; not only the condition of peace, but the consciousness, the realisation, the feeling of peace. It is in this latter sense that the Apostle uses the words in the passage with which we are now concerned. And it is about this peace—this peace of God which passeth all understanding—that I wish to offer a few simple remarks in the present discourse.

“Peace,” then, is that state of mind and feeling which results from our knowing for certain that God is to us a reconciled Father ; knowing for certain that our sins are forgiven ; knowing for certain that the promises of the Word, and all the privileges and blessings of the Christian covenant are ours ; knowing for certain that (after, perhaps, many

wanderings) we have at last found the home of our spirits—in the knowledge and the love of God.

I.—Now, there are hindrances to the perfect enjoyment of this “peace ;” and it may be well to consider some of them before we go any further. In the first place, then, our peace will be disturbed if we allow ourselves in any inconsistency of conduct. I am not speaking now of positive, unmistakable transgressions. From these, of course, the Christian disciple will resolutely turn away. But there are many things which lie in the border-land of sin, which have something of the complexion and character of sin about them—such as a laxity of speech, or a propensity to gossip, or an excessive indulgence in things allowable, or a hastiness of temper ; and a lack of strictness in such matters as these will inevitably cloud over the sunshine of divine favour, and cast a darkness over what may be, substantially, a Christian life. Our path of duty, then, is perfectly plain. We must be careful to cast out of our conduct things that are even doubtful ; to abstain from all appearance of evil ; to be on our guard against the infirmities to which we may be specially prone ; to avoid, so far as we can, the circumstances in which we are likely to be tempted to do wrong. Blots and blemishes, sores and ulcers, may not actually destroy our existence, but they may render existence burdensome, and may take away all comfort and strength and repose from it. And the health of the soul is what we cannot too earnestly and too sedulously attend to.

Closely connected with this subject of inconsistency is the other subject of the neglect of the means of grace. The Lord Jesus has appointed certain methods of maintaining the life which He has Himself imparted to us. We can

hardly suppose that He is ignorant of our constitution, and has imposed upon us rules which we could afford to follow or not to follow—just as we please. He must know us better than we know ourselves. There is the Word of God—with which He would have us make ourselves ever better and better acquainted. “As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.” There is the house of God, in which we are to engage in the work of united prayer and praise, not “forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.” Above all there is the Holy Table, the chief “trysting-place,” at which the Lord Jesus Christ meets with the people who believe in His name, and imparts to them the rich spiritual treasure of His broken body and poured-out blood. “This do in remembrance of Me.” Now, brethren, I dare not undertake to say how much of this provision for our soul’s well-being we can dispense with, and yet remain true members of the mystical body of Christ—that is for God to decide, and not for me; but this, I think, I am competent to affirm, that a neglect of any of the means of grace, or a slipshod and intermittent use of them, will so disturb the spiritual life, that the enjoyment of the divine peace will become an impossible thing. This fact is hinted at very plainly in the verse to which my text belongs. The peace which passeth understanding is conditioned, says St. Paul, by a constantly kept-up communication between our souls and heaven. Make a stranger of God, or regard Him and treat Him as a king who is accessible only on certain formal state occasions, and you will know very little about “peace.” But the peace will come and stay when you are ever going to God as a child to a father, ever

seeking His face and delighting in His love, ever carrying your troubles to Him and speaking to Him of your joys—when, in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving you make your requests known unto God.

Another hindrance may be found, I think, in the indulgence of anxiety, over-anxiety, solicitude, carking care. There is a beautiful little pool that you know something about—at least it is beautiful sometimes. The grass and the flowers wave on its borders, the trees sweep its waters with their branches, its surface is fair and calm and tranquil, and when the bright evening star rises in the cool light of the sky, it glasses itself in that fair pool as in a mirror, and you rejoice in the reflected beauty. Throw a stone into the depths of the pool, and immediately the image of the star is broken into a thousand fragments, and the loveliness, for the time at least, is gone. You can see nothing but dancing and quivering and glimmering lights. That pool is your heart. When it is calm it reflects the face of Christ, and you gaze on the reflection with delight. But let the cares of life drop into your soul, and the surface, so glassy before, is wrinkled and contorted now, and you lose the glorious face of Him who is the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely. Yes! “carefulness” is a bitter enemy of the Christian’s peace. We are often warned against it—by Christ first, by His Apostles afterwards. So, brethren, don’t let us say, “I cannot help being over-anxious. I am such constitutionally, by nature, by temperament, perhaps by habit.” For, if we cannot overcome the tendency ourselves, God will enable us to do so. And we can get the better of our carefulness by learning to cast our care on Him who careth for us.

I think another hindrance may be found in indistinct or imperfect views of the Christian faith. Unless we see clearly that Christ has done everything to obtain for us acceptance with the Father, and that what we have to do is simply to avail ourselves of His work for us, and to take it and appropriate it and rest upon it, if we imagine, that is, that there is anything left for us to do in order to make our spiritual position secure, I must confess I cannot see how it is possible for us to enjoy peace. Permit a simple illustration. By carelessness, by extravagance, by sin, we will say that I have run into debt and incurred liabilities which it is simply impossible for me to extricate myself from, and I, in consequence, with others dependent upon me, am on the very verge of ruin. Possibly I may carry the load thoughtlessly for a time, but at last I come to realise and understand the situation; and then I am as burdened and miserable as a man can well be. There is no hope, as far as I can see—no way of escape. The toils are closing round me, and I am in despair. Under these circumstances, a neighbour comes to visit me. He is a very wealthy man, as well as a very kindly one; and he assures me, to my utter astonishment, that he will take my liabilities on his own shoulders—all of them—and defray the whole debt himself. Now, if I believe Him (it depends upon belief, you see), if I believe that he is able, and that being a man of his word, he will do what he is able to do—what is the consequence? That my load of misery is gone, and I have perfect peace. But yet, again, will not this peace take to itself wings and fly away if—when I have parted from him—I begin to doubt his word, to question his capability, or to think that though he undertakes the greater

part of the debt, there is still something for me to do in the way of liquidation? Of course it will: you all know that.

Now do you not see the figure of Jesus Christ in my simple illustration? Is there one of you, who was an irreligious man, wandering from Christ, careless of Christ, neglecting Christ, defying Him, perhaps—but has now been brought to His feet and reconciled? If so, his experience is, probably, something of this kind: He had accumulated a load of sin—Christ calls it ten thousand talents—and every day was adding to the mass. For a time he was cheerful enough about it. The load seemed a shadow, a vapour, a dream. It was nothing. But one day, all this changed. He began to feel the pressure of his iniquity, and was miserable. As he crept along on the dark side of the street, almost fit to put an end to his existence—Christ, who was passing by, but who had really been watching him all the time—came across, and gently inquired into the cause of the man's sorrow. Sulkily and sullenly enough at first—for the sinner was suspicious (he had always hated or despised this Jesus of Nazareth)—he answered His question; but, at last, touched by the loving sympathy of the questioner, he poured out his whole heart, and told the tale. Jesus says that He will take the burden of sin upon Himself, and set him free. "Impossible!" (the man thinks) "after all that has taken place! After my many years' continuance in rebellion and sin! Impossible!" But when he *does* believe it—the load is gone! "Peace! perfect peace! in this dark world of sin? The blood of Jesus whispers 'peace within.'" Ah! yes, brethren, but if by any means we come to question whether Jesus has done it all—all—the voice ceases to whisper within, other sounds

are heard, and the blessed white-winged dove of peace departs.

II.—I pass on to another remark, or rather, another question. What does this peace of God do for us? It “keeps” the heart and the thoughts. The Apostle’s word suggests a powerful garrison placed in a fortress, and protecting it from dangers within and without. There are foes attacking the fortress from the outside. What are they? Temptations of various kinds, influences of the age, the general unsettlement of opinion, and other things—which each of my hearers can imagine for himself—the solicitations of sense, the various allurements of the world, the enemies who creep in through the eye, the enemies who creep in through the ear, the enemies who creep in through the brain. We are not secured against these by any amount of watchfulness (though watchfulness is always required), unless we have also within us the power of the “peace of God.” Then—we are placed above them, and they assail us in vain. And next, look at the crowd of clamorous appetites and desires (call them “thoughts,”) within us. They are like traitors in a city. It will not do to let them rise in tumult, and take the seat of power. They must be crushed, subdued, kept under. And this, too, will only be accomplished by the peace of God. The insurrectionary force of selfish and evil thoughts can only be mastered in the power of a realised enjoyment of the favour and the presence of God, based upon a communion with Him, by the Spirit, through the Lord Jesus Christ.

I have one more remark to make, and then I shall have done. It is not well, I think, to make this peace

of God (important as its possession is—important not only for our comfort, but also for our usefulness) a direct object of search. The way to get health—is not to trouble too much about it; but, as a rule, to mind your diet, and to take exercise. You know what a “valetudinarian” is—a man who makes his health his one thought and object in life. He doses himself, and is a standing plague and torment to his doctor; but health, somehow, always flees before him though he is ever pursuing her, and eludes his grasp. “Live on sixpence a day, and earn it,”—said rough, shrewd, sensible, plain-spoken Abernethy, to a man of that sort: and he gave his patient the best possible advice. Grand old Elijah—worn out by his gigantic and untiring efforts for the reformation of Israel; broken-hearted at his apparent failure, after so many long and weary years of prayer and work; believing himself to be alone in the world, without friends and sympathisers—hurries gloomily off into the desert, and flings himself down under a bush, earnestly, almost passionately entreating that God would put an end to his existence. Why should he live? Evil is triumphant in the world—and evil will triumph, for aught he can see, to the end. “*I can do nothing! I can accomplish nothing! I can effect no deliverance! All is useless! Why should I live! Lord, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers!*” But how does the wise and loving God deal with him? Well, amongst other things—He gives him work to do. “Rise, and go, and anoint Hazael to be king over Syria, and Elisha, the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah to be prophet in thy room—to take up the torch and wave it aloft when it shall drop, though it will

not drop yet, from thy failing hand." Said a Christian man to a friend, one day, in a sad and despondent tone : "For many years I have been praying, and praying earnestly, for the assurance of my salvation, for the inward peace—and all these years I have prayed in vain! The peace has never come!" His friend replied : "Yes, but you have all this time been taking the wrong method to secure the blessing. You have put yourself first, and God after. That cannot be right. Go away—forget yourself, and pray, 'Father! glorify Thy name.'" The advice was taken; and, the peace came gently and imperceptibly gliding into its place, and the heart was at rest.

May we not, then, say this? The peace is a desirable thing; not a mere luxury of the spiritual life, but an important feature of it, having practical results. But do not make it, in itself, an object of search. Do not even pray for it. But see that your views about Christ, and Christ's person, and Christ's work, and the relation of Christ to His people—are clear. That, first. Then, go and work. Do your duty. Think of God, before all things—not about yourself. Follow Christ fully, and leave the peace to come. It will come.



XXX.

THE BLESSING OF AFFLICTION.

“It is good for me that I have been in trouble—that I may learn thy statutes. The law of thy mouth is dearer unto me than thousands of gold and silver.”—PSALM cxix. 71, 72.

THE writer of this Psalm has obviously experienced, at one time or another, an unusual amount of trouble. The trouble, too, has not been of his own seeking. It has come upon him as the result of the resolute stand which he has made against the enemies of the truth. He has been bold and courageous for God, and has suffered, and suffered deeply, in consequence. From some points of view, then, the Psalm might well be attributed to the authorship of King David; but we are inclined to suppose that it was really written at a much later date; and probably at the time of the Babylonian Captivity. The internal evidence points, we think, to a man of considerable social importance in the exiled community, who is assailed for his faithfulness to the covenant, both by his apostate fellow-countrymen, and by the heathen of the place in which he dwells—who has many persecutors and adversaries; and who, occasionally, is by no means certain that he shall be able to escape with his life from the plots that are laid against him, and the snares tha

beset his path. However, without attempting to decide the question of authorship, let us rather concern ourselves with the view taken by the writer of the afflictions which he has been called upon to endure. To many persons (I doubt not) the desirable thing—the “good” thing—would seem to be, to have an easy life of it; a life unchequered by sorrow or loss, and, if possible, undisturbed by pain; a life which shall flow on with a clear even tide from point to point, until at last it falls quietly into the tide of eternity. But such, as you will observe, is not the opinion of the Psalmist. Looking back over the past, and weighing and estimating all that has happened to him, he expresses his firm conviction that his sufferings have been the cause of unspeakable benefit and blessing to his soul. “It is good for me,” he says, “that I have been in trouble, that I may learn Thy statutes.”

I may as well tell you here, why I am leading your thoughts in this particular direction. Of course, the subject of affliction cannot be out of place at any time in any congregation—even in such a congregation as ours. We are very favourably circumstanced. We have amongst us more than most congregations have of material comfort and of worldly prosperity—and yet we seem to be never free from the intrusion of sorrow. In some cases undeserved misfortune casts its grim shadow over our households; in other, perhaps more numerous cases, sickness and death break through all the barriers which we throw up against them, and carry off into the unseen world those who are as dear to us as our own souls; and I think I may say that scarcely a month passes by in which we are not summoned to sympathise with some friend or neighbour on

whom God has seen fit to lay the weight of His chastening hand. It is so with us now. Within the last few days there has dropped out of our ranks one who, for a long time, was a worshipper in this church, and a greatly-valued helper in some of the charitable works in which we are engaged. In the prime of her days—in the midst of much earthly happiness—she was suddenly called upon to face about as bitter a physical trial as the human frame can have to undergo. I never heard her murmur. Life was bright for her ; but it did not seem to occur to her mind that God was dealing hardly in removing her from its brightness. Her one thought was for her own unworthiness—her one fear lest, in the extremity of anguish, she might be led to distrust the fatherly love of God, and to rebel against His dispensations. As the end approached, she seemed to become manifestly more and more prepared for the presence of her Saviour ; and I doubt not that now—when she is at rest, if she could speak to us, and we could hear, she would echo the words of the Psalmist, and say, “It was good for me that I had to suffer—good for me that I was afflicted—that I might learn Thy statutes.”

Such is my reason for speaking to you this morning about affliction and its uses.

I.—Now, in considering the subject, I begin by taking for granted two things : the first of them, this—that nothing happens to us by accident. I cannot undertake to prove the point ; I know how hard it is to believe it ; I know how it sometimes seems to be untrue. Were you and I simply pieces of mechanism—obliged to act in obedience to some impelling force—you would readily admit that there would be no room for chance. We should be obliged to go

in one path, and prohibited from going in another. But we have all of us got wills—independent wills—and these wills are the most capricious things in the world. We may speak or keep silence—just as we please ; we may sit down or rise up—just as we please ; we may cross the road or remain on the side on which we are walking—just as we please ; and yet, the whole complexion and character of our subsequent career may possibly depend upon a choice which (the matter being so very insignificant) there seems to be absolutely nothing to determine. And then, again, we are surrounded by other human beings—each of them with a will of his own, and that a will the movements of which cannot be calculated upon with anything like certainty. This, as you see, complicates the problem still more, and we feel almost tempted to exclaim : “No chance in the world—do you say? Nonsense! Human life is full of it!” So, brethren, as I said before, I shall not attempt to prove my point. I can only rest it upon the teaching of Jesus Christ. And when I find Him telling us that the hairs of our head are all numbered, and that not even a little sparrow, the most valueless of the feathered creation, falls to the ground without the knowledge, the permission, the arrangement of the Supreme Disposer of events, who holds the universe in the hollow of His hand, and ordereth all things after the counsel of His own will—I cannot but believe that the most careful superintendence is exercised by God over the lives of the people of Christ ; and that nothing that concerns them is left to the domain and the disposal of chance.

The second assumption I wish to make is this—that all affliction is really the outcome of the Divine love, and that the purpose of it is to impart to us a blessing which by no

other means would it be possible for us to receive. And here again, our feelings, I venture to think, are not unfrequently found to be at variance with the plain statements of Holy Scripture. The earthly father chastises his child. What for? Not, surely, for the pleasure of inflicting pain—but simply because he realises strongly the importance of enforcing the distinction between right and wrong, and of compelling the submission of the wayward, youthful will to his will, to whom God has entrusted the responsibility of direction and rule. Yet the child does not always—perhaps does not often—see this. Under the smart of his punishment, he believes that his parent is unnecessarily and unfairly severe; or, that he feels a delight in the tyrannical exercise of authority; or, that he enjoys the sight of suffering and pain. And something of the same kind may be detected, I think, in the sentiments of some of us—perhaps of most of us—in times of overwhelming and protracted sorrow. It is hard *then* to repress the thought, either that God has forgotten us, or else that He is dealing with us more harshly than is necessary; or, perhaps that He is really indifferent to the distress that has come upon the creatures of His hand. But the testimony of Scripture is explicit on the point: “He doth not willingly afflict,” says the Prophet, “nor grieve the children of men;” and again, “Though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies.” God does cause grief, and He must cause grief—necessity, as it were, is laid upon Him in the matter. And yet we need not hesitate to affirm that it is a manifest relief to Him when He finds Himself at liberty to change His mode of treatment, and to let the stream of His compassion flow forth upon those who have been the subjects of His severity.

Taking, then, these two thoughts with us—first, that nothing happens to us without our Heavenly Father; and then that God has no pleasure in human sorrows, but quite the reverse—let us proceed to consider what may be said to be the “purposes” of affliction.

II.—In the case of the ungodly, under which broad term I include all those who, in whatever way, are seeking self, and not seeking Christ, affliction is intended to have the effect of drawing them from one path to another—from the wrong to the right. We may speak, I think, of two classes of the ungodly. There are the coarsely ungodly; and there are those who are ungodly with somewhat of more refinement than others. I mean this. A man may live in the practice of gross sin, in open defiance of the Divine Law—in impurity, for instance; or, in fraud and dishonesty; or, in manifested contempt of all that is sacred and holy; or, on the other hand, shrinking from such extremes as these, and being, perhaps, by nature and education averse to them—he may devote all his energies to some one of the attractions of the world—to money, or fame, or power, or pleasure—whilst yet preserving, and justly preserving, a reputation for blamelessness and integrity. There is a great difference, of course, between the two kinds of lives; a difference in the effect produced upon the man himself: a difference in the effect produced upon society at large. But the two lives are alike in one respect. In both of them the claims of eternity are forgotten, and the attention is fixed solely and exclusively upon the things of time. Now, we may be tolerably sure, brethren, that, in both these cases God will not leave His creatures to the devices and desires of their own heart. He is too merciful for that. He will

interfere—in other words, affliction will come. In the one case, the affliction will seem to be intelligible enough. If broken health should follow upon a course of vicious indulgence ; or, if misfortune should strip a man of ill-gotten gains—we feel at once that God is dealing with the sinner, and endeavouring, by severe and stringent measures, to bring him back from the error of his ways. Not so, perhaps, in the other case—the case of the kindly and reputable worldling. And yet, brethren, here, too, affliction may be equally needed, although we cannot trace any connection between the suffering and the life. Here, too, there must be decided measures in order to break the chain of worldliness, by which the soul is held down to earth : here, too, there must be chastisement, which shall bring home to us the guilt and the folly of wandering from the knowledge and the love of the Heavenly Father. The reality of the eternal world, and the evanescence of this, must be forced in upon us ; and the very worst thing that could possibly happen to a man, when placed in such circumstances as these, would be to be left alone in a condition of unchanging comfort and prosperity, without anything befalling him that was calculated to disturb his self-complacency, or to awaken and arouse his conscience.

Some little time ago I stood on the Hampshire coast, looking across the sea in the direction of the Isle of Wight. The day was an unusually brilliant one for the time of year ; the sun flooded the sky with his radiance ; touched with brightness the sails on the horizon, and shone in innumerable many-twinkling sparkles over the broad expanse of water that lay at my feet, The whole scene, earth, sea, and sky, was very fair and pleasant to behold ; but not

a glimpse could I get of the island itself—it was shrouded in mist. A day or two after, I stood on the self-same spot. The brightness was gone. The rain had come, or was coming (I forget which). Anyhow, the air was full of moisture, and there the distant island stood out distinctly to my view!—with its meadows, its tinted cliffs—even, I fancied, with its houses, and the lonely rocks that jut out from it far into the sea. I thought that I had had a good illustration of the merciful purposes of affliction. Give us the bright sunlight of unchanging prosperity, and this world will be fair enough; but we shall probably see nothing beyond it. The glare and the haze will hide the distant view, and it will not be until we look, as it were, through an atmosphere that is charged with tears, that we shall be able to see the green fields beyond the flood—the land which (as the Prophet says) is so far off, where the King walks in His beauty, and the blessed inhabitants, freed from their burdens, rest in calm and peace and felicity for ever.

III.—We have now to consider the case of the people of God. Brought by the Spirit to Christ, they yield obedience to their Saviour's commands, and strive to follow (God helping them) in His footsteps. . What are the uses of affliction to them? The uses are manifold. Let me point out one or two. First, *the school of suffering is a school of heavenly discipline.* The best of us have faults—perhaps serious faults—which require to be amended. To Peter, good and true as he was, came his sad fall to correct his tendency to self-confidence; to Paul—the thorn in the flesh, in order to keep him from being puffed up with spiritual pride—a danger to which he seems to have been constitutionally

exposed. And, probably, we should find (if we knew everything) that to all the true disciples of Christ is not only trial sent, but also the particular kind of trial which their temper and disposition and circumstances call for. The Lord above is no blundering physician, who applies one nostrum to every case ; but He suits the medicine to the disease. When He sits as a refiner and purifier of silver, we may be sure that if we have dross to be purged out of us—and which of us has not, be it more or be it less?—dross of selfishness, dross of pride, or vanity, or temper ; dross of cowardice ; dross of untruth, of unreality ; dross of any kind of worldliness—the crucible in which we are placed will be the right one for the purpose, and the fire put under it will burn only as hotly, and blaze only as long—as the process requires.

It is in trouble, too, that we learn, to a great extent, to put into practice the teaching of the Word of God. What will “patience” mean to us if we are never called upon to exercise it ? Shall we ever really understand “humility” if nothing occurs to pull down our conceit, and to keep us from thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think ? And, if we are practically unacquainted with suspense, or anxiety, with the disappointment of cherished hopes, or the failure of our carefully-laid plans, if everything goes smoothly and evenly with us ; if health is always firm, and prosperity always safe, and the family circle always unbroken, and we have success and comfort all round—how can it be expected that we should ever learn properly that greatest, most important, most profound, and most life-long of all lessons—the lesson of trust in the living God ?

Again, *the school of suffering is the school of Divine instruction.* Do you remember the second verse in my text ?

“The law of Thy mouth is dearer to me than thousands of gold and silver.” I understand the Psalmist to imply by the insertion of the second verse, that, through his affliction he had found a treasure, and a treasure so precious that he did not grudge the price he paid for it, heavy as it was. And what was the treasure? A fuller insight into the mind and will and heart of God. Before his trouble came—“The law of God’s mouth”—by which I suppose is meant that Revelation of the Divine Being which is given through the lips of inspired men, or through their actions, recorded on the sacred page—had been, comparatively, a sealed book to him. Something he knew, but not much. Affliction was the key which opened the door, and allowed him to glance into the sacred cabinet. And what he saw there, and what he became possessed of there—was more than a recompense for all that he had been required to undergo.

And in this respect, I fancy the experience of the children of God corresponds very closely with that of the writer of the Psalm. It is in time of trouble that the Written Word (at least, in certain important parts of it) gives up its deeper meanings to us, and shines with a light of which we had never been aware before. I do not, indeed, mean to say that our intellect is sharpened by adversity, but rather that, at such a time, the Heavenly Father uses the Word for the purpose of letting us more into the secret of His love. And the thing is to be expected. How often we find that our sorrow brings out for us an unsuspected amount of sympathy from our fellow-men! We thought, perhaps, that they were well-disposed towards us; but they made no special demonstration of regard. And we never could have believed (unless we had had actual experience of it) how

deep was the fountain of kindly and tender feeling in the hearts of our brethren. We never could have even dreamt of being so cared for as we found ourselves to be. Why should it surprise us, then, if the Saviour, the Lord Jesus (of whose affection for us all human affection is like a mere single ray of light issuing from the broad disk of the sun), should choose the time of our sorrow in which to draw nigh to us more closely, in which to make Himself better known to us, and thus to unveil to us more of that Divine love which prompted Him to give Himself for our salvation—in which to show us how His presence can illuminate the darkest path, and lighten the load of the heaviest burden we may have to bear?

And yet, once again—*The school of suffering is the school of instruction not only for those who undergo it, but also for those who witness it.* “What does your Christ do for you?”—is the question which is often, inaudibly perhaps, put to us by the world. And well will it be, brethren, if you and I can answer (not so much by words as by deeds): “He enables me to bear my suffering patiently; He keeps me in the midst of the bitterest sorrow from distrusting the love and the wisdom of God; He supplies all my loss, and sustains me when I am in danger of going wrong, by the sense of His compassion and His love; He gives me songs in the night; and sometimes I can even rejoice in the midst of my grief, at the thought of that exceeding weight of glory which He is preparing for those who unfeignedly love Him.” You have doubtless noticed that some of the best of God’s saints are the most severely tried by trouble. May it not be that they are suffering for the sake of others—I mean, to show to others what God can do for His people? I often think

it is so. The affliction may, of course, be for themselves, for their own personal profit as well, but it is more for others. We look at them, and our faith is strengthened. We feel, as we look, how real are the things of salvation ; the fact of the supernatural life is forced in upon us. Yes, "Evidences of Christianity," as they are called, are good ; but there is no evidence of Christianity comparable with that afforded by the faith, and patience, and submission, and hope and cheerfulness of a suffering saint.



XXXI.

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.

“Forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”—EPHESIANS iv. 32.

IN the first chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, we find an account of what might very properly be called the formation of the Christian Church. The plan adopted is a very simple one. A couple of young men follow Christ in the road, in hope of obtaining an interview with Him, and are invited to come to the house in which He is lodging. The conversation which ensues decides them to attach themselves to His ministry. Then they go forth and call in some four or five of their friends, to hear what their new Teacher has to say; and these men, too, are entirely won by the marvellous personality; and thus a little band is gathered together, which constitutes the germ of that vast and increasing spiritual society, to which you and I belong. Now, we gather from the narrative that one chief cause of the attraction which Jesus exercised over these young men lay in the fact that they believed Him to be the “Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” Of course, at such an early period as this, these young men had, and could have, no

conception of the Godhead of Jesus Christ. That great truth was revealed to them afterwards, and revealed by the processes of a slow and gradual education. But they certainly felt that, in some way or other, Jesus of Nazareth had the power to cleanse them from the pollution, and to release them from the burden of moral evil—in other words, that it lay within His competence to obtain for them the divine forgiveness of their sins. More than this, they did not at the moment understand. The mode of the deliverance was hidden from them. However, what they did believe and know was sufficient to establish a link of inevitable connection between them and their newly-accepted Master.

After these young men had been for some time associated in this way with Jesus of Nazareth, He began rather unaccountably to speak to them about His approaching death, and amongst other things, told them that He had come into the world for the purpose of giving His life as a ransom for many. The statement was so unwelcome to them, and indeed so perplexing, that, at first, they seemed unable to form any idea whatever of the Saviour's meaning: but after a time, the truth forced its way into their minds; and when, at the table of the last supper, Jesus spoke about "His blood, which was to be shed for them"—they could not but have known not only that He was going to die, but also that His death was, in some way or other, connected with the forgiveness of their sins. It was this dying that constituted Him the Lamb of God, which in a dim sort of way they had believed Him to be at the time when they first cast in their lot with Him, and became His disciples. It would seem, however, that the matter was not perfectly clear to their minds until some

time after—perhaps not until the descent of the Spirit at the Day of Pentecost. Then, they understood that Christ had come to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself—*i.e.*, they understood that their own Jewish sacrificial system found its interpretation, its completion, its fulfilment, in Him, and in His death upon the Cross of Calvary; and then their minds naturally enough reverted to the magnificent ceremonial of the great Day of Atonement, when the high priest—after his many hours of unseen occupation in the sanctuary, presented himself to the expectant thousands in the vast temple-area below him, announced to them the divine acceptance of the sacrifice which he had just offered, and with uplifted hands blessed them in the name of the Lord, as a people from whom the impurity of their sin had been wholly cleansed away.

The conclusion from all this, brethren, is the obvious one—that the writers of the New Testament, inspired by the Holy Ghost, regard the forgiveness of sin as something inseparable from the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross. It is possible, as of course you are aware, to maintain a different view from this. Some have thought, for instance, that God remits the penalty, and reinstates the offender (if repentant) in His favour—without exacting any atonement whatever for the offence. “Go, and sin no more.” Such a mode of action is considered as being marked by a magnanimity well becoming a God, who is also the Father of His creatures. And so, perhaps, it might be, if God were only a Father, and not also a Lawgiver, a moral Governor, a King—bound by the strongest of all obligations, by regard for His own authority and influence, by regard for the true welfare of the beings

He rules—to execute judgement against the violators of His divine enactments. And, again, it has been thought by others, that atonement for transgression may be made, at least in part, by our own personal suffering ; and this is the basis upon which the fallacious and unscriptural doctrine of Purgatory has been built—the Sacrifice of Christ being supposed to be availing only up to a certain point, the soul must have, it is said, its remainder of sin purged away by the action of penal fire—fire endured for a longer or a shorter period, according to circumstances. But these two views stand outside the sacred record : they are human inventions, and nothing more. What we are taught in Scripture is this—that God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven us ; that there is no condemnation for them that are in Christ Jesus : that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin that Jesus Christ the righteous is the propitiation for our sins. Why, I might quote till you were weary of quotations, and you would see in all (although the form of expression might be different in each), that that stupendous sacrifice offered upon the Cross is the one thing which makes it possible for God to forgive us ; which makes it possible for God to forgive us freely, without the addition of any act or suffering of our own ; which makes it possible for God to forgive us completely, so that there is nothing else remaining to be done ; and which makes it possible for us to find rest and peace in the assured conviction that our transgression has been forgiven, and our sin has been covered. Let what I have just said stand for the first topic in the present discussion. I pass on to the second ; and here I do not intend to propose any theory of atonement. I am not sure that I have one. I do not enquire how it

comes to pass that sin is put away by the sacrifice of Christ. But, taking for granted that you and I obtain forgiveness in that way, and in none other, I ask you to consider with me the practical advantages resulting to ourselves from the divine arrangement.

II.—Now, the spiritual problem (if I may venture so to speak) is this—how to set human hearts perfectly free from the oppression of sin, so that we shall regard it as an enemy still, but as an enemy whose power to ruin and destroy us has been neutralised ; and yet, at the same time, how to inspire those human hearts with the intensest hatred and abhorrence of sin. It is, I think, a comparatively easy matter to make men indifferent about transgressions against God—at least, until their conscience is really aroused. For instance, brethren, tell us (as some do) that God is far too merciful and kind to inflict such penalties as those spoken of in the Scriptures upon creatures so frail as we are ; tell us that He merely shouts angrily at sinners, like an unwise father at his child, without meaning anything by it, except the deterring us from a repetition of the offence ; tell us, in fact, as the tempter told our first parents in Eden, “Ye shall not surely die ;” or again, tell us (as I fancy our hearts often do) that sin, after all, depends upon constitution, and circumstances, and antecedents, and unavoidable companionships : and therefore is, to a very great extent, a matter for which we are not really responsible ; and that, if the worst come to the worst, all that we have to do is just to say to the Lord that we are very sorry, and that we will do our best to conduct ourselves more properly and more becomingly in the future—make us believe such statements as these, and our estimate of the evil of sin will

inevitably be reduced to so low a figure that we shall be ready to conceive ourselves perfectly competent to deal with it in our own strength; and the fact of being unpardoned will fail to arouse in us anything more than a passing sensation of alarm—even if it does so much as that. This is one side of the question. On the other side, there would seem to be no such very great difficulty (at least not under circumstances when men's consciences are really stirred) in creating in them an awful apprehension of the consequences of sin. What you and I need, brethren, in order to be able to take a true view of the subject of sin, and of what God thinks of sin (ah! that is the point—not what I think of sin; not what you think of sin; nor what society thinks of sin; not what literary men, and scientific men, and philosophers and journalists think of sin—*but what God thinks of it*) what we need, brethren, is just to have our eyes opened so that we may see the true state of the case.

Has it ever occurred to you that we have round us—in this district of ours—the very clearest and most striking exhibition of the divine estimate of moral evil, the most remarkable evidence of the difference that exists between God's thoughts and ours upon this particular point? I allude to our Jewish neighbours. These neighbours of ours are worthy and estimable people, well-conducted, kindly: who shall say a word against them, as to their social and moral conduct? No one. But they represent to us the whole Jewish nation. And in the divine dealings with that Jewish nation there is something that is very significant in connection with our present subject. Look, brethren, at the history of the Jews. What do you see? A people whose annals, for nearly nineteen hundred years, have been

written in fire and blood. In all countries in which they have been scattered they have, at one time or another, been exposed to the most unrelenting and unrelaxing cruelty. Even now (as you know) they are persecuted and oppressed, although their present sufferings are the merest trifles when compared with those that stain the page of the bygone centuries. Indeed, it may be said that their history, ever since the fall of Jerusalem, has been one black record of mourning and lamentation and woe; and that if it had been possible for ill-usage to stamp them out, they would long ago have disappeared from off the face of the earth.

Now, ask yourselves what the Jews have done to deserve such treatment as this. Are they sinners above all other men, that they should be thus singled out for perpetual misery and desolation? that they should be, amongst the members of the human family, the one race with the restless foot and the hungry heart; the one object of scorn and dislike and aversion to all men? In days gone by they defended their capital desperately; but shall we English blame them for this? we, to whom life itself would be scarcely endurable, if the foot of a foreign invader rested upon our soil, and his yoke were pressing upon our necks? Surely not. And as to the years that followed the destruction of Jerusalem: have these Jews been monstrous violators of human law? have they maintained customs, or have they indulged habits, which have brought upon them the deserved reprobation of their fellow-men? It is notorious that they have not. Faults they have had, and have still; and what nation is free from faults? but, unquestionably, they have been a quiet and law-abiding race, characterised

by love for their homes and their children ; and almost the worst thing that can be said of them, from a social point of view, is this—that, wherever they go they succeed—by their industry, by their ability, by their shrewdness, by their indomitable perseverance—in pushing themselves to the front. Now, you and I believe that there is a just God that ruleth the earth. Why, then, has this monstrous wrong (as it seems to be) been permitted, and permitted for so long a period—for nearly two thousand years ? Brethren, there is, and there can be, but one answer to the question. God visited the Jews with judgments because they rejected His Christ when He came ; and He continued to visit them with judgments because every successive generation—down to the present time—continued the rejection which their forefathers began. See, then, what God thinks of the sin of unbelief—ay, the *sin* of unbelief. It is a sin which many people, as I need not tell you, estimate very lightly indeed. They will condemn adultery, murder, theft, fraud, lying, slander—and rightly enough. But who cares much for unbelief, the root of all the others ? And yet, if we interpret rightly the history of the Jews : if massacres, and burnings, and slavery, and the cruellest treatment and the intensest misery—and all of these distinctly predicted by their own prophets—and all of them going on for century after century—if these things are characters large enough and distinct enough in which to read a divine message, we ought not to fail to learn that the one offence which God—merciful as He is—will not consent to forgive is the rejection of His own Incarnate Son.

I must confess, brethren—for myself—that the thought which I have just put before you gives me more awful ap-

prehensions of the divine severity than any other consideration that has ever occurred to me. I ask myself—"If God punished—and punished so unrelentingly—for the sin of rejecting His Christ, why should I expect Him to spare me if I should be found guilty of the same offence?" Perhaps you say, "But you have not crucified Jesus Christ as the Jews did." What has that to do with the matter? The crucifixion was only the outward manifestation of the inward feeling. The feeling is the thing. It is the rejection of Christ (in whatever way that rejection may be expressed) that brings down the curse.

Now, to come round to my point—it is possible, I say, so to present to an awakened conscience the wrath of God against sin; the "extreme malediction" (explain the words how you will) which will fall upon those who are impenitent and unforgiven—as that the soul shall be simply overwhelmed with horror. But the result will be—it must be—despair; and very probably an abandonment to utter recklessness of living. Observe, then—it is easy enough in some cases to produce despair; and it is easy enough in other cases to produce an indifference to sin. But how to produce a true estimate of sin, and yet at the same time to set us free from the power of its curse, and to embolden and enable us to contend successfully against it—that is the problem. How is it to be solved? It can only be solved by the Cross of Christ. There we behold sin in its true colours. We see that it is such a powerful thing, as to be able to reach up its long, black, foul arm into heaven, and pluck the eternal Son Himself down from His throne, and nail Him to a tree on a hill outside the walls of Jerusalem, and leave Him to die a death of shame and agony between two convicted

malefactors. Seeing that—who shall not dread sin? dread its power, its pollution, its curse? Who shall not do his best to fight against it and overcome it, so as to be quit altogether of its clinging malignity? But there, also, we see that sin is a vanquished thing, and impotent to destroy, though able to harrass, the true people of Christ; and that it is so because Christ hath put it away, has neutralised its efficacy, has drawn out its poison-fangs, has done away with it, and has destroyed it, by that wondrous sacrifice of Himself on the Cross of Calvary.

Observe then how the matter stands. We dread sin, but we do not dread it too much. We contend against it, but in the assurance that through Christ we shall be able to overcome it. The load is lifted off our hearts, and we have peace, because God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us; and yet (sin being—as we have found it to be—so terrible a thing—so hateful to God and so destructive to man) we are preserved from the danger of supposing that, when our transgressions are forgiven, we have, as it were, a clean page set before us, and are at liberty to run up a fresh account. No! That is not the effect of a true acceptance of the sacrificial work of Christ. The effect is rather, that we are able to leave the sad and sinful past behind us, like a garment we have thrown off, and are encouraged to press forward in a new and ever new career of earnest self-consecration, and of joyful filial obedience, to Him who is our God and Father in Jesus Christ.

XXXII.

MAN'S APPARENT INSIGNIFICANCE, BUT REAL GREATNESS.

“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained : what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?”—
PSALM viii 3, 4 (Bible Version).

MOST of us, I suppose, when placed in similar circumstances to those of David, have felt exactly as he did. The thought of the utter insignificance of man when compared with the grandeur of the universe in which he dwells, has almost overpowered us. Not, however, being poets, and therefore not possessing either the sensibility of the force of expression granted to that privileged class of men, we have been unable to put our feelings into such beautiful and striking language as that of the Psalm. But the feelings have been there, stirring—even if stirring inarticulately—within our hearts and minds.

Now, what the royal Psalmist would have said on the subject had he lived in these days of ours, and known what you and I know about the heavens—we can hardly presume to imagine. Of course, the spectacle presented by an Oriental sky is a peculiarly imposing one. And when the shepherd-boy, keeping his flock by night, or when the fugitive fleeing

over the Judean hills from the emissaries of King Saul, looked up and saw the stars coming out one by one, and hanging their lamps on high, until the whole firmament was ablaze with these brilliant points of light—his heart would naturally throb with exultation at the thought of the greatness and the power of the God, who was his God, and the God of his people, and whose fingers had made the wonders of the wondrous scene before him. This, brethren, is intelligible enough. There was for David, as there is for us, the vast and mysterious vault, arched at an unknown distance above his head; the innumerable hosts of worlds belonging apparently to a system of things in which man has no part; the calm undisturbed order of the whole: and added to this the silence and solitude, the bustle of earth being hushed for the moment, and every influence disposing the soul to contemplation—there was, I say, all this for David, just as there is, under similiar circumstances, for us. Yes, but consider how much more modern astronomical discovery has opened up to our view. For instance, we know this—and David could not have known it—that the fixed stars, as they are called, are suns, huge, incalculably huge masses of matter, each of them placed in the centre of a system or family of worlds, and each of them holding its one family of worlds, attached by unbroken bonds to itself. We know that if we were to heap together more than a score of populations, each of them of the size of the population of this great metropolis of ours, every individual in that stupendous aggregate might stand as a representative of one of these central suns; and that, even then, the number of the suns would not be fully told. More than this. We know, or at all events, we have reason to suspect that, although

astronomy, with its far-reaching instruments of vision, has revealed to us the existence of these millions upon millions of floating globes, we have not as yet penetrated to the utmost boundary of the regions of space ; nay, perhaps, that we have only advanced a comparatively short distance in the task of investigation. And if this be so—and even if it be not so—even if we remain satisfied with these crowds of fixed stars as we know them, with their still greater crowds of attendant planets and satellites, consider what an idea we get, if we think at all, of the incalculable vastness of the material creation. And then all these masses, larger or smaller, had to be created, and brought into their present condition, by what countless processes of shaping and modification we can none of us tell. And that they had to be started on their course, and kept each in its orbit, each going on at its proper pace, without collision, without confusion of any kind—an intricate piece of harmony, but a harmony still. And then again—seeing that it is hardly conceivable that these innumerable orbs should be all of them barren and desolate, without living and sentient inhabitants to people their surface—the imagination steps in and burdens itself with the thoughts of myriads of beings, perhaps beings in many respects like ourselves, with wants to be supplied ; with feelings to be considered ; with cares and anxieties perhaps to be soothed—who constitute the widespread household of the great Father and Creator of us all.

I.—Look you then, brethren. Even in such a rough and incomplete sketch as this which I have given you, the picture is simply a tremendous one. You understand me, of course ;
ather, you understand the Psalmist David. He is not

instituting a comparison between himself, in the smallness of his bodily frame, and the material world in its bigness. Such a comparison is out of the question. You cannot pit matter against spirit. That wonderful thing which we call a human soul is greater far than the earth ; greater far than the solar system ; greater far than the wide universe itself ; greater far than all things material put together. It has life, the life of God in it ; it is a spark from the great source of existence Himself ; and the other, which we set over against it, is inanimate and dead. No ! The contrast in David's mind lies between the infinite greatness of God, as evidenced in the extent of His works, and in the multitudinous character of His occupations, between this on the one side, and the insignificance of man on the other. And I say again, that if you accept the conclusions of modern science,—the sentiments expressed by the sacred writer in the Psalm will come home with a tenfold force to your mind. It will seem to you as if God must deal with His creatures in masses. It will seem as if a discriminating care and superintendence were simply impossible. It will seem as if, amidst the almost infinite multitude, a single individual could have no chance, and no claim, for the regard of the Ruler of the whole. And your language will be the language of the text—"When I remember the heavens, the work of Thy hands, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained : Lord ! what is man, that Thou art mindful of him ? and the son of man, that Thou condescendest to visit him ? "

II.—But now, brethren, let me ask you to notice, in the second place, that the thought which we have described as rising up in the Psalmist's mind, is presently felt by him to

be a superficial one, and is discarded to make room for something else. On further meditation, he becomes convinced that a truer view may be taken of the condition of man, and a view more in accordance with the glory of God; and to this he turns in the succeeding verses. Let us consider what that view is. It is this. In spite of his apparent insignificance, man is a wonderful being, wonderful in his present; wonderful in his future; wonderful in his position on the earth; wonderful in the possibilities that are in him for the kingdom of the hereafter. It is to the former of these two aspects, man's present condition, that the Psalmist directs our attention. First, he tells us that man has been made, at his creation, a little lower than the angels. I find in the Revised Version this rendering—"Thou hast made him but little lower than God." And I suppose the rendering is correct. It seems rather bold; but it may be explained by the fact, that David is probably referring to the well-known passage in Genesis—in which it is said that "God made man in His own image."

There would seem, then, to be something of the divine about man, some peculiarity of position with respect to God, which is found in no other being that ever passed from under the Creator's hand. We, who are acquainted with the Incarnation, can understand how this may be. It is not so astonishing to us. David had only a glimpse of the truth. Then he tells us that man has been made a king, crowned with glory and honour, the dominion placed in his hands, and all things put under his feet. Now sin, of course, has interfered with the realisation of the divine idea. Still, there are traces enough left to show that the original intention has been, and is being, carried out. The earth is

given over to the children of men. Not only do we rule over the animal creation, which although occasionally rising up in rebellion, for the most part does us service ; but man, by degrees, is compelling, in a marvellous way, the forces of nature to do his bidding. It may be truly said that now the sun paints our portraits, and the lightning carries our messages, and the sea has become the highway of the nations. We run to and fro, and knowledge is increased ; and in every direction we are penetrating more deeply into material mysteries, compelling earth to render up her secrets, and enlarging the boundaries of the empire of human knowledge. What more may come, of course I do not know ; but probably a great advance in our command over creation. Anyhow, brethren, we may see in what has taken and what is taking place a fulfilment, partial of course, but still real, of the statement that " God hath put all things under our feet."

Man, then, is a king in this world, and a being who stands (I suppose we may venture to say this) next in dignity and importance to the throne of the eternal God Himself. But this seems so startling a statement that I must hasten to justify it, if I can ; and here we come to a third and very important point in our discourse.

III.—We do not suppose that the Psalm is what is commonly called a " Messianic " Psalm. The writer's view, in all probability, was bounded by the horizon of the present. He was speaking of what man is and does now ; and he was not, consciously at least, referring to the future. But it was inevitable that when he was dealing with such a subject, his language should point with no ambiguous or indistinct directness to the Incarnation of the Son of God.

And so it does. We, then, can read between the lines of the Psalm. And this is what we read—"Man is what he is—because the Son of God has taken upon Him human nature ; has become the second and last Adam of the human race. This fact throws a solemn and, indeed, an awful importance round the person of every one born of the children of men. It makes it a blessed thing to accept, it makes it a fatal thing to repudiate—as we may do, if we like—our relation to our Lord Jesus Christ." But we will put aside the topic of the repudiation. The Psalm is a bright one, and we will keep our exposition of it a bright one to the end. Let us consider, then, the prospects that open up before us : let us consider the possibilities that lie in our human nature—when it is redeemed by the blood of atonement, and sanctified by the gracious power of the indwelling Spirit of God.

There is a mysterious but most real union between the Lord Jesus Christ, and the people who believe in Him. They are members of the mystical body, of which He is the Head ; they are branches in the true vine, of which He is the tree itself ; they are stones laid upon the great Rock Foundation, which is the personal Jesus Christ, and are thus built up by degrees into a temple to the praise and glory of God. In fact, they are one with Him, and He one with them ; and His wondrous life flows into them, and gives them life. And the result of this union is a fellowship—in intercourse and in sympathy, in interest and in operation.

Let us see. The Lord Jesus—the Son of God—is not only our Saviour and our King, but also our Companion and our Friend ; and in Him we come into contact with the

divine mind itself. This is no slight privilege. This cannot but have an exalting and ennobling effect upon us. What would it be for you and me to be intimately associated with one of the master-minds of earth? to be on familiar terms—terms of friendship and of interchange of ideas—say, with Shakespeare, or Milton, or Newton, or Bacon, or Handel? or again, with Moses, or Isaiah, or John, or Paul? But we are permitted to enter into the thoughts of the God-man Himself, and to have him as our Instructor and our Guide. It is a fellowship, too, in interest and in working. Whatever Christ has, is ours (strange as it may seem to say such a thing). “Heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ”—that is the Apostle’s description of Christian people. And then, as to working. We are not to suppose that Jesus Christ does by Himself what is going on in the world, and leaves us to stand on one side and look on and admire, and every now and then sing a hymn about it. That is not His way. He acts through His people. They are labourers together with Him. They are His fingers, His hands, His arms, His tongue—He being, of course, the great moving source and central power, the Head of all. And how can we be associated with such a Lord and Ruler as He is, without being elevated by the association? How can it fail to be that the best should be made of our manhood, that all our faculties and powers should be drawn up to such height as they are capable of attaining to in this world, when we are engaged in the grand service of establishing the kingdom of truth and righteousness and love upon earth?

And as to the future—that wondrous future, before which the veil hangs now—we have only hints and glimpses; but they are significant. They show, at least, what is involved

in belonging, really belonging to Jesus Christ. That our bodily frames, these inlets to pain, these decaying tabernacles, these feeble receptacles and servants of the inner spirit—that these shall undergo a strange transformation, and receive capacities and endowments, of which it is impossible for us to form even a conception now, seems certain enough. We remember what Christ says—“Then shall the righteous shine forth like the sun, in the kingdom of their Father.” We remember what St. Paul says—“Jesus shall change our body of humiliation, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body.” We remember what the Apostle John says—“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.” This is enough for the present. The vision is dim, and must be dim, but we see through it transcendent beauty and mighty powers of mind and of body, in addition to the perfect purity and holiness, which are the chief characteristics of the redeemed in the kingdom of the hereafter.

Nor are other intimations wanting. “Know ye not”—says St. Paul to the Corinthians—“that we shall judge angels?” And again, “If we suffer with Christ, we shall reign with Him.” And then there is that marvellous statement of the glorified Christ—“To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne: even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne.”

I cannot, of course, undertake to explain such words as these. But they must mean something; and they must point to a reality, to some real power and greatness and dignity and authority—I know not what—which is to be granted to the people of God in the future, and which is

foreshadowed in the language of the Psalm with which we are concerned to-night. For clearly that language refers to man, so far as he belongs to Christ, and is included and involved in Him.

And will it seem fanciful, if I suggest that no unimportant part of the occupations of the future state will be the investigation, with greatly sharpened faculties, of the marvels of Creation, as well as of the marvels of Redeeming work? God's love, God's wisdom, God's power in Redemption—these themes, of course, will come first. These will ever dwell most largely in the thoughts and affections of the people of God. But other works of God are "great, and are sought out of all them that have pleasure therein." The wonders of even this little earth of ours—drop in the ocean as it is—this one leaf from a tree in an illimitable forest—this mere speck in the vast plains of immensity—even these earthly wonders are inexhaustible. And may we not reasonably expect that, in the eternity before us, we shall find endless occupation and delight, and endless reasons for praising and blessing God, in our survey of the broad provinces of Creation, into which we shall hereafter obtain an entrance? I go out at night, under a starlit sky. It is a magnificent sight, this: but I—even if I am an astronomer—learn comparatively little from it. I am too far off. I look up to the airy giant, with his burnished zone—the grandest sight in our hemisphere—as he wheels slowly over our wilderness of human habitations. But he is silent to me. I turn to the Pleiades—that mysterious group of stars—dim, misty, tangled, interwoven—in the heart of whose depths is supposed to dwell the infinitely vast central sun, round which the whole of the innumerable systems revolve.

But no voice from them reaches my ear. I turn to the noble Arcturus, but he goes on his way—majestic, calm, silent, utterly unheeding me. And yet the day may come (is it a foolish fancy?) when I may know not a little about these vast and bright worlds, with all their secrets, and take an infinite delight in the knowledge.

Ah! brethren, but it all depends upon one thing—that I should belong to Christ; that I should be united to Him by faith: that I should be, and should remain, a member of His mystical body; that in Him I should overcome. Only on this condition can I hope to attain to the greatness which I have been speaking of to-night. For only in Christ is it true of man, that “Thou hast crowned him with glory and honour: and made him to have dominion over the work of Thy hands, and hast put all things under his feet.” “O Lord! our Lord! how excellent is Thy name in all the earth.”



XXXIII.

TESTIMONY BORNE TO CHRIST BY HIS ENEMIES.

“ Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others ; himself he cannot save.”—MATT. xxvii. 41, 42.

IT seems, at first sight, a little strange that such men as these—the dignified ecclesiastics of Jerusalem, the men of station and influence—should be found under such circumstances on the hill Calvary. The Roman centurion and soldiers were present, of course, in the discharge of their duty. The rabble was present ; because then, as now, there were everywhere, and especially in cities, coarse and brutal natures, to whom an execution was a holiday. The relatives and friends of Jesus were present ; because, agonising as it was to accompany Him, they could not bring themselves to desert Him in His hour of extremity, when all the world seemed to have combined together against Him. But these chief priests—these scribes and elders—what has brought them to this scene of blood ? And how is it that they have become so far forgetful of their dignity, and have so far divested themselves of the feelings of humanity, as to mock and jeer at the sufferings of one who, if He is

nothing else, is at least a dying fellow-creature? They have succeeded at last in hunting Him to death: why cannot they let Him die in peace? It has been suggested, in partial excuse of their inhuman behaviour, that Pilate's action about the title on the Cross had made them anxious lest the feelings of the multitude might turn in favour of the Great Sufferer; and that they were there to point out by their scoffs the discrepancy between the helplessness of Him who was crucified, and crucified by the edict of a foreign and heathen power—and the pretensions implied in the words placed over His head: "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." But, after all, brethren, the simpler explanation is perhaps the better one: that the hate which these men felt towards Jesus was so strong as to override all considerations of honour and mercy. For three years and more He had thwarted them in their ambitious and worldly schemes; He had exposed their spiritual incapacity; He had taught doctrines subversive of their influence with the people; and now that they have crushed Him under their feet, they cannot resist the temptation to come out to that foul and bloodstained hill, for the purpose of enjoying their triumph and mocking their victim.

I.—However, passing away from this topic, which is not a very inviting one, let us advance to consider the testimony which on this occasion is borne to Jesus Christ by the very bitterest of His opponents. You will observe, first of all, that these chief priests and scribes are not ordinary or ignorant people. They are men of education and culture—men gifted with remarkable intellectual acuteness; and, having watched Jesus of Nazareth all through His career, they perfectly understand the meaning of the language which He uses

about Himself. I would beg your very special attention to this point. To the populace the expression "Son of God" might have meant only "Messiah, the King of Israel." To these scribes and priests it meant very much more. In their secret council, held before they brought Him into the presence of the Roman procurator, they had condemned Him on the charge of blasphemy. When they led their prisoner into the Gentile court they fenced with Pilate. At first, they wished him to condemn Jesus on the ground of their condemnation; when he refused to do this, they charged Jesus with offences against Cæsar; and then, at last, when they perceived that the shrewd Roman saw through their hypocrisy, and that they could not bend him to their will by all their efforts, they produced the real gravamen—"We have a law; and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God." How that statement disconcerted Pilate you will all of you remember. He felt at once that there was something mysterious about Jesus which he could not understand, and that these accusers of His were conscious of the mystery, as well as he. I beg you, I say, to mark this. And then, in the second place, will you observe that, in this moment of triumphant malice, these men speak out fearlessly and without hesitation what is in their hearts? Were Jesus living they might have to be guarded in any admissions they might make about Him in public; but now that He is virtually dead and done for, admissions will count for nothing—except so far as they may serve to drive more deeply into the soul of the sufferer the poisoned dart which they have succeeded in lodging within Him. Taking, then, these thoughts with us, brethren, let us now plant

ourselves near the Cross, and listen to the taunts of the chief priests and scribes and elders.

Those taunts seem to take two directions. First, the Redeemer's relation to men, and then the Redeemer's relation to God—is made the subject of the most contemptuous allusion. "He saved others, Himself He cannot save." Now, we have evidence here, from the mouth of those who would not willingly speak a good word for Christ, that His work upon earth was one of unceasing beneficence. There were certainly two occasions (the one, when He cursed the barren fig-tree; and the other, when He caused the destruction of the Gadarene swine) on which, what might be called "mischief" was wrought by His ministry. But these were exceptional. At all other times He went about doing good—scattering His benefits broadcast, everywhere lifting off the load of suffering and misery that pressed heavily on the human creatures by whom He was surrounded. To save others was His great occupation—His ruling passion; and that this had been the case is frankly admitted even by His enemies who surround the Cross. But it is well for us, I think, to observe that, if these acts of kindness had been of the ordinary character—such, I mean, as you and I are capable of performing—there would have been very little sting in the taunt of the priests. There would be nothing remarkable about the fact that a benevolent man should be incapable of rescuing himself from suffering and death. If, however, that benevolent man had once been able to wield supernatural power, and if, for some reason or other, that supernatural power had failed him just at the very moment when it was required for his own deliverance, then we can easily see what opportunity

would be given for his foes to triumph over him, and we can readily believe that they would be sure to avail themselves of it. In the words, then, of the priests and scribes there lies the tacit admission that Christ had wrought *miracles*—and those, miracles of mercy. And their contention is that the power which had made Him a miracle-worker, whatever it was, and from whatever source derived, has deserted Him in His time of need. What explanation they give to themselves and to others of the fact of His being a miracle-worker, matters nothing to us. We are only concerned with the fact itself. Now-a-days an influential class of thinkers tell us that the miraculous is impossible, and would persuade us, if they could, to tear out the threads of the supernatural from the web of the Gospel-story. But the keen, shrewd men, who lived in our Lord's day, and hated Him; who watched His every movement with a jealous scrutiny, and whose interest it was to prove His pretensions false—were compelled by the force of truth to acknowledge that He had done amongst them the works that none other man ever did, or ever had power to do.

II.—In a somewhat similar way, brethren, we have the unconscious and involuntary admission of the fact that Jesus of Nazareth had claimed to be the Son of God. What the expression “Son of God” means in the mouth of these ecclesiastics we have already seen. And the point of their taunt lies in the contrast between the greatness of the asserted relationship to Jehovah, and the utter helplessness and prostration of the person who asserts it. “Lo!”—we imagine them saying—“lo! the man whose life was characterised by such devotion to His God and Father in heaven; the man who made Himself equal with God; who uttered

the monstrous words, 'I and my Father are one;' who told the high priest, when we had Him before our tribunal not so many hours ago, that He was the Christ, the Son of the Blessed; and that, as such, He was coming again in the clouds of heaven. Why, thou sham Son of God! are we to believe that, if Thou wert what Thou hast the effrontery to pretend to be, the Father would leave Thee thus to perish in shame and misery? The thing is inconceivable." "Let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him; for He said, I am the Son of God." Again, brethren, as in the former case, we do not concern ourselves with the Jewish explanations of the language of Christ: our business is simply with the fact that is admitted. It is enough for us to know that the Lord Jesus Christ did claim equality with the Father—did assert that He was the Son of God. On this point we accept the testimony of His enemies. It is the more valuable because it is unconsciously given. And knowing, as we do, our Master to be the truth itself, we believe and are sure, on this ground alone if we had no other to go upon, that He is not only the Christ, but also the Son of the living God.

And before we part from our subject altogether, let us turn from the painfulness of it to the glory of it, from the sad exhibition of the intense animosity which the human breast is capable of entertaining towards the Holy One of God, to the bright exhibition of that divine love—the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of which it is impossible for us to comprehend. How touching, when rightly interpreted, are these words of the priests: "Himself He cannot save." *Cannot?* Why, He has but to speak the word—He has but to will it in His thought—and more

than twelve legions of angels, clothed in celestial panoply, will come sweeping down from the battlements of heaven, to avenge Him of His enemies, and scatter them as dust before the whirlwind. But then, how should the Scripture be fulfilled that thus it must be? And how should the redemption of man be accomplished? No, it is true that He cannot save Himself. Not the Roman nails, but His own love and pity keep Him fastened there; and He will not descend from the Cross until the great work for which He has come into the world has been accomplished. "Blessed Jesu! Blessed Jesu! Fount of mercy, we lift up our hearts to Thee this day, as we stand and listen to the taunts of Thy foes. We know what they mean, these unhappy men. But behind their words there is a hidden meaning which fills our souls with thankfulness and joy. Even while they curse there passes before us the long procession of Thy gracious and loving acts. We see Thee—the eternal Son—laying aside Thy glory, and coming amongst us as man, to save. We witness Thy life of self-denial for us—of deep devotion to the Father. And now, O Jesu, we perceive that this rough Cross is only the altar on which our great High Priest has gone up to offer the wondrous sacrifice of Himself; and as we gaze on what is taking place, the vision of His glory—the glory of Thine unspeakable love—opens to our view, and draws us up from the sin and the meanness of earth, into the transcendent purity of that heaven, in which Thou art seated now at the right hand of the Throne of God."

XXXIV.

THE CURE FOR DESPONDENCY.

“And now, Lord, what is my hope? Truly my hope is even in thee.”

PSALM xxxix. 7.

IN these days of ours, the question is often asked, “Is life worth the living?” and the answer, as frequently as not, is given in the negative. Such an answer might perhaps be expected under the circumstances. We are not less religious, I think, than our forefathers; but, for one reason or another, the burdens of human existence press more heavily upon us: problems demanding solution are starting up with a bewildering multiplicity on every side, and the consequence is that whilst a small minority, whose surroundings are comfortable and whose hearts are callous, profess to regard this world as the best possible of all conceivable places to dwell in—not a few are inclined to despair of any adequate or lasting amelioration of the general condition of the human race. But, after all, although this “pessimistic” view (to use the common phrase) has become more articulate of late, and more widely diffused, it was by no means unknown in times before ours. In fact, the thought has always been in the hearts of men; and every now and then expression, more or less forcible, more or less religious, has been given to it. If I am not mistaken, the Psalm just quoted from is an instance in

point of the truth of what I say. It is a Psalm of David—so the heading informs us ; and there seems no reason for disputing the accuracy of the statement. To what period of David's history it is to be assigned, it is difficult to decide. But anyhow, the Psalm may be regarded as a deliberate answer to the question, "Is life worth the living?"

David is recording a mental struggle through which he himself passed, and telling us how he was lifted up out of the mire of despondency, and had his feet set upon the rock. It is a simple record of personal experience, and not in anywise a controversial treatise. The Psalmist experienced in himself, too, feelings which he believes to exist in the hearts of others ; and he experienced a deliverance from them which he would gladly teach others how to enjoy.

But let us examine the composition a little more closely. It gives us the impression that the writer had been suffering from a sickness which at one time threatened to be fatal ; that the sickness brought with it very painful depression ; and that, for some reason or other, his sick-room was haunted by persons who came there ostensibly for purposes of friendly condolence, but really in the hopes of finding that the disease was gaining ground, and that the patient was hastening rapidly to the borders of the grave. All this is likely enough to have happened to David, after he had been called to the throne. Let us suppose that it was so. We say, then, that the prospect of approaching dissolution had cast its gloom over the monarch's spirit, as he lay in his hushed and darkened chamber. He looked back over his past life. What a dream it was ! How shadowy ! how unsubstantial ! The hours, the days, the years had flitted by, and he had been busied with a multi-

tude of things ; but what had come of his incessant activity ? Nothing—nothing worth recording. All was vanity and vexation of spirit. And when he glanced round him upon other men's lives, the same mark of laborious but useless and unsatisfying trifling seemed stamped upon everything that he beheld. What were they—these toilers of the human race ? A band of children, busily engaged with building in hot haste and with infinite pains sand-castles on the seashore when the tide is down. Look at them. One heaps together his pile of money. Rising early and late taking rest, he eats the bread of carefulness—and the heap grows up under his eye day by day. Another rears by degrees his edifice of fame. A third builds up a fabric of power, of authority, over his fellow-men. Each in his own way raises up some kind of structure. But, presently, the waves of ocean return, and all the sand-castles—erected as they have been with such a vast expenditure of time, and labour, and anxiety, and thought—are swept away before the rush of waters, and not a trace of them is left behind. “What a picture of human life !”—David says—“and my life is only like the rest. And why has God made us thus, and made us for nought ? Why has He called into existence a race of beings so utterly contemptible as we are ? toiling everlastingly, but accomplishing nothing ; reaching at and grasping nothing ? hoping, but never obtaining—a race, whose one reality seems to be suffering and sorrow ? Has God brought us into the world to mock us ? or can it be that there is no future for us ? that we rise up, like bubbles on the surface of a stream—just glittering for a moment in the sun, and then disappearing for ever ?”

With such gloomy and disheartening thoughts as these,

we suppose the monarch to have struggled. And the mental conflict was severe. Over and over again he was tempted to speak out (even in the presence of those hypocritical visitors of his)—so fiercely raged the tumult within. But he sternly and resolutely restrained himself. He kept his mouth, as it were, with a bridle—while the ungodly was in his sight. Expression would have been a relief. He would have been comforted if he could have told out his doubts, his questionings, his misgivings, his perplexities. But had he done so, the enemies of Jehovah would have taken fresh occasion to blaspheme. He kept silence, then, at whatever cost to himself; and only when the backs of his visitors were turned did he hasten to pour out the burden of his sorrowful heart before the throne of grace. It was the one thing to do. His only hope of a solution of his difficulties was in the personal God. To this God, then, he turns. He does not clamour for an explanation. That, perhaps, will come hereafter, or it may not come at all. But he asks for the forgiveness of his offences. He prays that he may be kept from incurring the reproach of the foolish; he entreats that the heavy load of wasting disease may be lifted off from him in consideration of his weakness—in the recollection that he is only a stranger and a sojourner on earth, as all his fathers were. He begs that the divine hand may lead him henceforward throughout the rest of his earthly pilgrimage. “O spare me a little, that I may recover my strength before I go hence, and am no more seen.”

If then, brethren, this be the true interpretation of the Psalm (and I think it is), we can imagine that David's answer to the modern question would be something of this

kind: "Yes; life is worth living if God be admitted into it; if God rules and moulds and guides it by the power of His presence and His love." Let this simple exposition of the Psalm stand for the first point of our present discourse. We will pass on now to two thoughts of some importance suggested by it.

II.—In the first place then, this persuasion of the insignificance of human life—a persuasion which perhaps takes hold of us all at times—is really an exceedingly superficial one, and will not endure a moment's careful examination. "Man walketh in a vain shadow," cries the Psalmist. "*It seems so,*" we reply. We have been—most of us, I presume—in a hill country; and on a fine summer or autumnal day, when the sun was shining brightly, and the winds were blowing, we have, perhaps, stood to watch the shadows chasing each other in rapid succession over the side of some not very far distant mountain. It was an emblem of our human life. The generations come and go. Men and women move in procession before our eyes: they fret and fume their little moment—but, ere we have had time to scrutinize them closely, and to become really acquainted with them, they have disappeared like the shadow of the cloud—and their places are occupied by others. Our ancestors—where are they? Who knows or cares much about them? Our predecessors in the same profession or pursuit; or in the same neighbourhood, or in the same congregation—it is not many years before the very memory of them is lost. Like an arrow cleaving the air, like a ship ploughing the waters of the sea, a momentary trace is left behind, but that is all. So soon passeth our life away, and it is gone.

And though it is true that some men stamp their mark on the world, yet these are very few and far between. With the great majority of us it is very different. A hundred years hence, brethren, and what traces will remain of us who are here in the house of God this morning? What record will there be of all the struggles, and trials, and joys and sorrows, and successes and failures, and anxieties and rivalries and efforts which we represent? All will be gone. Nothing will remain. Ay, how worthless, because how transitory, it appears to be. "Man walketh in a vain shadow." And if so, is it not the natural inference that it is absurd to draw a long face and to make a serious business of such a trifle as human life? Mere creatures of a day, let us—seeing that we are here—get through the day as well as we can, and reap as much enjoyment, and avoid as much sorrow, as we find to be possible; and then lay ourselves down to die—well content to be out of the farce.

But again, brethren, I repeat that the transitoriness is only in appearance. Human existence seems to be a shadow. It is nothing of the kind. It has a grim, an awful substantiality about it. I ask you to consider this statement earnestly, and in the following way. Events fly by very quickly, true enough. Say, for instance, that we commit a sin. That sin, no doubt, has been prepared for—I mean the train has been laid for it. Nothing, with us human beings, happens suddenly. The sin was the outcome, the blossom, the bursting forth of an antecedent course of carelessness and evil. But, when enacted, it was a thing of a moment. It came and it passed by, and it went on (as we thought) to be a portion of the dead or dying past, and after a while we felt that we had little or nothing to do with it. But there is

in us a strange faculty called "memory." With a single touch memory can make that past dead sin (for so it seemed to be) a living thing, and fasten it on our heart and conscience with bands of torturing fire. You remember the story of Jacob? For forty years the patriarch had been leading his life in the plains of Padan-Aram, a simple shepherd. His was a useful, busy, and a blameless life. He attended to the flocks and herds of his employer sedulously. He was a good husband and father; he brought up his family of children; he was a religious man too, in the basis of his being; he believed with his whole heart and soul in the Unseen, and worshipped the God of his fathers. And that sin, that terrible sin of deception and falsehood, which drove him out of the country—was it not in the far-off past? Was it not dead? Was it not forgotten both by God and man? Why should it trouble him now? Forty long years ago!—surely the thing might be passed over after such a lapse of time—might it not? But look at Jacob, in that dark midnight hour, by the side of the brook Jabbok. Hear him pleading, entreating, beseeching for forgiveness; agonising in prayer; clutching hold, as if for bare life, of the Angel of the covenant. Watch the awful mental anguish that the man has to pass through; and take away with you an idea of the power which memory possesses to make a sinful past a present and a living thing. The old Greeks fabled that for those who were to enter the Elysian fields—that abode of happiness and joy—the waters of oblivion (they called it the river of Lethe) had to be passed through. They could not conceive—and, indeed, I think it is hard for us to conceive, Christians as we are—how the perfect happiness of heaven could be enjoyed so

long as memory endured to call up the spectres of the transgression and shortcomings of the past.

Consider again. Life is transitory, no doubt. Events rush by with a startling rapidity. Yes ; but influence abides. I might speak here of the effect produced upon successive generations, by the master-minds of the human race, on whom God has bestowed the gift of thought, or of song, or of language. The man may be little more now than a name. But what a power he wields over the destinies of others—sometimes for good and sometimes for evil ! Dead, he may be ; but still he is one of those sceptred kings that continue to rule our spirits from their sepulchral urns ; and ages yet unborn will feel the pressure of the hand he lays upon their hearts and minds. The licentious poet, or the infidel thinker—long, long after he has passed away and is no more seen—will sweep crowds of the youth of every successive generation into the broad and downward path, and hurry them to perdition. And, on the other hand, the breathing thoughts and burning words of good and great men remain behind them to be the inspiration of thousands and tens of thousands of their fellows, and to stir the human soul to high and noble deeds.

But though I could tell of these things, brethren, I would rather remind you of the simpler lives which such persons as you and I are leading, and I would ask you to bethink yourselves of the debt of gratitude that most of us owe, or at least have owed in our younger days—to gracious influences of various kinds. It was a simple remark, perhaps, made in our hearing, but we feel the good effect of it now ; or it was a gentle expostulation, a kindly rebuke, but we think of it thankfully to this very moment, for it turned us into the right

path. It was not much, but by God's blessing it was enough. It was very transitory, but the effect of it endures. Or perhaps it was a germ of thought found in a book, or heard in a speech, or listened to in a sermon, which dropped into our soul, and since then has grown and expanded into magnificent proportions, and filled our whole career. Or yet again, it was granted us, it may be, for a short time to be in contact with some pure and lofty spirit, tender and true, loving and Christlike, which seemed almost too good for earth; and though the vision flitted rapidly away, and we saw it no more, the recollection of it still floats before our minds, and lifts us up to higher and nobler things, and makes God, and heaven, and Christ, and truth, and purity ever more and more realities to us. But I need not multiply illustrations. I have said enough to show that, when we are attempting to form a correct estimate of human life, we must take influence as well as memory into our account.

And there is one thing more to bear in mind, that it is by means of these transient and trifling events, of which our history on earth consists, that our characters are being formed. Don't let us for a moment suppose that, in the great day of account, the Judge comes forward, and enters into a sort of calculation, in order to ascertain whether we are to pass to the left hand or to the right; to misery or to happiness. The idea is a mistake. Every man goes to his "own place"—the place for which he has prepared and fitted himself. Every soul, naturally and inevitably, moves to the centre towards which it has been gravitating during its whole career. In other words, our character decides what our destiny shall be. And our character is being formed in us hour by hour, day by day—is being formed and fixed by

the use we make of the circumstances through which we so rapidly pass. To the great result something is contributed by every duty which we fulfil or neglect ; by every temptation that we resist, or succumb to ; by every opportunity that we seize or pretermitt ; by our intercourse with others—in the family, in business, in recreation ; by the thoughts that rise within us ; by the words that issue from our mouths. Our lives need not be on a great scale for the accomplishment of this purpose. Ordinary events are sufficient ; and we may depend upon it, brethren, that slowly and silently, but surely, *that* is growing up within us now which will ultimately prepare us for, or cause us to recoil from, the intolerable brightness of the presence of God. Observe then, I pray you, that the transitoriness of our human life does not detract from its deep importance, so long as memory, and influence, and the formation of character, remain to be taken into account.

Let me close with a brief note of encouragement. If I understand the Psalm rightly, David enters upon a new and far happier state of feeling as soon as he has turned to the Lord, and heartily taken Him into his life. The gloom, the despondency, has gone. Hope springs up, and with it courage and strength to grapple with the difficulties of life. And why should it not be so with us ? Let God come in—really come in—and the whole character of our existence is altered. Brethren, have we tried the experiment ? It is worth trying. Many of us, I daresay, know what it is to look with a pained dissatisfaction on the past, and to feel what a muddle we have made of it (as far at least as the higher purposes of existence are concerned). Our life, we feel, has been a poor, dishevelled, broken, halting, stum-

bling thing. Ay, and perhaps it is so. But if we put the matter in God's hands, if we recognise His presence and love for us, if we come to Christ by the Spirit, there will be an inexhaustible fountain of hope within our souls which will keep us ever fresh, ever strong, ever courageous, ever forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto these things which are before, and pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.



XXXV.

YOUNG MEN WHO HAVE OVERCOME THE EVIL ONE.

"I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one."—1 JOHN ii. 14 (part).

IN the passage to which our text belongs the Apostle seems to describe three successive stages of the spiritual life. In the first of them he puts "little children," probably meaning by that phrase not so much children in years, as beginners in religion; and about them he tells us that their sins have been forgiven them for Jesus Christ's sake. We may call this stage, I think, "the stage of initiation." At the other extremity of the line he places the "fathers," *i.e.*, the advanced and established disciples, whose chief characteristic is, "knowledge of Him that is from the beginning." And here we have what we may call the stage of "maturity." Between the two he interposes the stage of "conflict." In this we find what he denominates "young men"—that is to say, persons who are encountering the full force and flow of the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil; and who are "more than conquerors, through Him that loved them." With the two extremes we do not concern ourselves this morn-

ing. We will concentrate our thoughts upon the intermediate class : and our subject shall be "Temptation : and the way to overcome it"—two simple points, which we will consider in the order in which they occur.

I.—First, then, Temptation. The word, of course, needs no explaining. Everybody understands it. From very early years we have been conscious of an influence impelling us in the direction of that which is wrong—an influence which we have sometimes yielded to, and sometimes have successfully resisted ; but against which we have always felt bound to be on our guard. Probably most of us have discovered that, up to a certain point, we can depend upon our own resolution and force of character, but that beyond that point we are helpless ; that we are very liable to be suddenly betrayed into evil ; that it not unfrequently occurs to us to hold out against temptation for a time, and that then a moment of relaxation comes when we are precipitated down the slope, on the verge of which we have been standing. All these considerations are calculated to make us thoughtful—or, as I should rather say, to make us anxious—if we understand, in ever so slight a degree, the momentous issues that are bound up with a human life. But it is, brethren, when we view the matter in the light of Revelation that the subject assumes a very grave, and, indeed, an almost appalling significance. There is, we are told, an invisible spiritual agent, who makes it his chief occupation and most earnest endeavour to accomplish our destruction. Formidable through his vast intellectual capacity, which renders us as powerless before him as pigmies before a giant ; and formidable through his perfect acquaintance with human nature, which he has studied ever since the

race appeared on the earth—he is even more formidable still, by reason of the intensity of the malignant hate which he cherishes towards those whom he regards as the object of divine favour. Nor does he stand alone. He is the head of a vast confederation; and we are consequently endangered not by one, but by many; not by the opposition of men, but by the machinations of evil spirits; not by grotesque imps and demons, whom we can afford to laugh at and despise, but by grave, majestic intelligences, who are banded together for the purpose of making us (if they can) as wicked and as miserable as they are themselves. “We wrestle”—says the Apostle Paul—“not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” Now, it is just this disclosure of the spiritual peril in which we are placed, which gives such force to the prayer put into our mouth by the Lord Himself—“Lead us not into temptation.”

Some years ago, it was said by a Christian preacher (a good man, though not over wise), that if he had to make his choice of two roads to travel in—in one of which he knew that he should be free, or comparatively free from temptation, whilst in the other he knew that he might expect to have to encounter temptation of the very severest kind—he should certainly choose the latter. And why? Because, he said, by his victory over the danger (which victory he seems to have taken for granted) God and God’s grace would be conspicuously glorified in him. I think the good man must have forgotten, for the moment, that clause of the Lord’s prayer which I have just quoted. And surely it would have been better far if he had learnt to say, “I am

so weak, so liable to fall ; the world, and the god of the world, have still so much power over me, that I cannot but entreat the loving Father who orders my steps, so to order them as to keep me out of circumstances which shall greatly try my constancy and my faith. He knows what is best, of course ; and I leave all to Him. But if it be His will, I would far rather be led in a plain path, as free from perils as may be—than in a difficult and a dangerous one. Other men, better and stronger than I am, have fallen. Why should not I ? And besides, I remember that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, armed as He was with perfect innocency, and with divine gifts, did not go forth of His own accord to seek temptation ; but that when He went into the wilderness to encounter the evil one, He went there because He was ‘led of the spirit ;’ went there (that is) in obedience to the direction and under the guidance of His Heavenly Father. So I make my petition—‘Lord, lead me not into temptation.’”

But, in the next place, suppose that after offering this prayer, in all sincerity, we should happen to find ourselves in a position in which our faith, our obedience, our constancy, are greatly tried—what then ? Why then, I think we shall instinctively turn to the well-known words of St. James—“My brethren, count it all joy, when ye fall into divers temptations.” You will observe the expression “fall into.” The persons addressed have not been wandering out of the way in search of some spiritual adventure, in which their strength of character, or the amount of their grace shall be exhibited—but have kept steadily to the path of duty, and there have encountered temptation, as it were in a hidden pitfall, the existence of which they had no reason

to suspect. Under such circumstances they are directed by the Apostle to be thankful, to rejoice ; and the reason for the rejoicing is assigned in the following verses.

I understand it in this way. We are placed in this world for this purpose amongst others, of acquiring the character which shall fit us for the world that is to come. We must begin, of course, with the possession of spiritual life (for it is only a living man who is susceptible of education) ; and that spiritual life must be obtained by union with Christ through faith ; and that faith must be obtained by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Once in possession of the blessing of life—our education, so to speak, our training commences ; and the work goes on more or less rapidly, with more or less of interruption, throughout our earthly career down to the end. Of course, brethren, it has to be admitted that every one who is really born of God, is ready for entrance into the divine presence at any period of his spiritual existence. There is a great difference between the newly-born child in his feebleness and helplessness, and the strong and stalwart full-grown man ; but in this respect the two—the man and the child—are alike, that both have organs, capacities, feelings, which adapt them for the condition of things into which they have been introduced ; and that both are perfectly at home on the earth. We may suppose then that, although all the denizens of heaven are equally at home in heaven, and equally fitted for its duties and enjoyments, there are diversities of capacity and power, such as we find amongst ourselves on earth. There may be (I do not know why there should not be) in heaven something corresponding to childhood, and something corresponding to middle life, and something corresponding to age—of

course, without age's infirmity and decay. The infant who has breathed for a few hours or days, and then has passed away to the bosom of the loving Father above, can hardly (one would think) occupy precisely the same position as the war-worn veteran soldier of the Cross, who (like Paul) has fought—and fought long—the good fight, and finished his course, and kept the faith. And when we consider that, although the future kingdom is in one sense a region of rest (for there will be no jar in the movement, and no weariness in the effort), yet it is also a region of work, for “His servants shall serve Him”—there seems still more reason for supposing that our training and discipline now will be adjusted with perfect accuracy to the service which we shall have to render to God hereafter. If so, we can easily perceive the necessity for temptation, or trial; and the advantage of it too when it is successfully endured. The soldier learns his drill and military exercises on the parade-ground, or in the review, or in the sham-fight; but it is the field of battle, and the contest with real foes, that bring out the qualities that are in him, and make him all that a soldier ought to be. And it is in the struggle of life—in the resistance we have to offer to the solicitations of sense, and the weakness of self, to the evil influence of human companions, or the more subtle assaults of invisible spiritual foes, that we disciples learn (God helping us) to acquire something of the mind and spirit that were—or rather that are—in our Divine Master Christ. The school of temptation then, if I understand St. James aright, is the school of heavenly training. And whenever we see some poor sufferer racked with almost unceasing pain, yet bearing patiently the heavy load, not murmuring against her lot, not entertaining

misgiving or doubt, but praising and blessing God in her anguish ; or, when we see some man of business who will not comply with the ways of the world, and who struggles on with difficulty—refusing success because, in his case, success involves violation of conscience, or some young man who remains staunch to his principles, to his conscience, to his Saviour—in the midst of the jeers of his fellows, and the subtle insinuations of an infidel philosophy ; wherever, in fact, we see endurance of loss or suffering, and steadfast adherence to the cause of righteousness and truth, and resolute surrender of self-interest for the sake of others, and all for Christ's sake, and in the strength which Christ bestows—there we may well believe that we are looking on at the welding and fashioning of a noble instrument by which the purposes of God, both here and hereafter, are to be accomplished.

Let me direct your attention, briefly, to a third thought, which is that temptation is invariably adjusted to the strength of him who has to bear it. Not unfrequently, brethren, we hear the exclamation—"Never has anybody been called upon to suffer as I do ; never was anyone so tried as I am ! My misery is exceptional." Now, such talk as that is simply contemptible. It is the offspring and outcome of personal vanity—the vanity of those who wish to make themselves out to be something different from other folk. Whatever we may be called upon to suffer, let us be sure that somebody else has been in the suffering before. Human experiences closely resemble one another. And let us be sure of this, that God does not lay upon His people more than He enables them to bear. "He keepeth all our bones: not one of them

is broken." Bruised they may be, these bones; aching they may be; bent the back may be, and straining the frame may be, with the heavy burden. But no injury will be done. The faith, the patience will not fail, if we seek to God for a constant supply of grace; God will hold us up—and that continually; and when the day comes, the strength will come too; or to express it all, in the significant language of St. Paul—"There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able—but will with the temptation also make a way to escape—that ye may be able to bear it." With these three thoughts, brethren, on the subject of temptation, I occupy the first part of my address this morning. Let me recapitulate them. It is wise for a Christian man to pray not to be led into circumstances that shall try his steadfastness. If, however, being in the path of duty, he finds himself suddenly plunged into such circumstances, let him rejoice. God has brought him there, and God thereby makes Himself responsible for his spiritual security. And being in such circumstances, let the man be sure that he will be divinely strengthened to endure. The fire may rise high; but it will not rise so high as to do anything more than purge out his dross. I pass on now to a few concluding words upon our second point—*The method of overcoming temptation*. And here I turn to the language of our text. The young men are strong, and their strength is shown in the fact that the Word of God abideth in them; and the result is, that, in this strength, they have overcome the wicked one. Here, the central point seems to be the Word of God, and the relation in which these young men stand to it. Let us consider the point closely.

II.—The Word of God plays a rather more important part in the work of our salvation than, I think, is sometimes supposed. For instance, in the mysterious process—which we call the “new birth of the soul”—this Word is an instrument that cannot be dispensed with. Let me refer you to St. Peter. He says of Christian disciples—that they are “born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.” Or let me refer you to St. James. He says of God, “of His own will begat He us with the Word of truth.” And from these statements we gather that, where there is no acceptance of the message of salvation through Jesus Christ, there is, in an adult, no impartation of the spiritual life. But the Word of God not only meets us at the outset, but it goes along with us through the Christian career. It is the instrument of growth. “As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby.” And this Word of God must “abide in us” (that is the phrase of our text); or, to express it differently, we must believe it, hold it, keep it, use it, apply it, advance in acquaintance with it down to the very end—or, assuredly, we shall not be found amongst those who “overcome.” Observe then, brethren, this Word of God is the very key of the position, round which the spiritual battle rages; and it is against our hold of it that the evil one directs his most strenuous and most deadly efforts. If he can succeed in detaching us from it, he has accomplished our spiritual ruin; for it is only so far as the Word abides in us that we are safe. And you know of what nature his efforts are. He endeavours to undermine the authority of the Word. He arrays against it the forces of

destructive criticism (I say "destructive," for there is a legitimate criticism); or of scientific investigation; and although a good many of us have not the leisure, and perhaps not the capacity for judging of the arguments advanced on either side, yet he succeeds in unsettling our confidence in Scripture—and that is enough for his purpose. More commonly, however, he cajoles us into negligence in the matter. How many drift into this! How little of even reading of the Bible there is amongst professing Christians, not to speak about the study of it. And the Bible is like a human companion and friend. Constant acquaintance with the man, association with him, interchange of feelings and ideas, will inspire you with confidence in his character, a confidence not easily shaken by the representation of his enemies. But a slight and imperfect acquaintance will leave you at the mercy of every false tongue that wags against him. So—make the Bible a friend, and it will take a good deal to induce you to distrust it. Know little about it, and anything almost will throw you off the balance of trust. But our time is fast passing. Let me gather up what I would yet say in our concluding illustration.

In a certain author—with whose writings I am familiar—occurs a spirited description of two soldiers, mortal enemies, meeting in single combat on a certain battlefield. Both are accomplished swordsmen; and they attack each other with the fury of a long-standing animosity. But for a time no advantage is gained by either; nor, beyond the receiving of some flesh-wounds, is either of them seriously injured. But presently the kick of a passing horse breaks the right arm of one of the fighters, and he is left at the mercy of his enemy who, ungenerously taking advantage of the helpless

state to which his adversary is reduced, passes his sword—"with a grin of ferocious hatred," says the writer—once, twice, thrice through his body, and stamps upon him when he is down, and fiendishly mocks him. In some such combat, brethren—only of a spiritual kind—are you and I engaged. Our weapon is the "sword of the Spirit—which is the Word of God." Our deadly opponent is the evil one. He cannot compel us to throw away our sword ; but he can persuade us to do so. And if we throw away the sword, do you expect that we shall overcome the "enemy?" *Overcome him !* brethren. The idea is absurd. He will overcome us, and lead us captive at his will, to be his subjects now, opponents (though it may be unconscious opponents) of the kingdom and purposes of God ; and to be sharers of his terrible doom when Christ comes again to take to Himself the kingdom, and reign, and to put all His enemies under His feet.



XXXVI.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

“I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.”—JOHN x. 14, 15.

ONCE or twice, or oftener perhaps, during the period of my work amongst you, I have discussed from the pulpit these two somewhat remarkable verses. On those occasions, if I remember rightly, I have always pointed out that the arrangement of the words in the text of the Authorised Version very seriously interferes with the true interpretation and understanding of the Saviour's meaning. I think I can hardly do better than begin this morning by repeating that remark. The fact is not that the translation, but that the punctuation of the verses is at fault. There is (as you, of course, observe) a full-stop between the two verses; but there ought to be none. The sense runs on, and we should read the words thus: “I know My sheep, and am known of Mine as the Father knoweth Me, and I know the Father” —*i.e.*, there is a close parallelism between the knowledge which exists between Christ and His people, and the knowledge which exists between Christ and His Father. And I am sure, brethren, you will not fail to see at once

that this statement, although difficult to comprehend, is one of too great a value, and of too deep an importance, for us to afford to lose it altogether. However, without any further comment on the point, which will turn up again in its proper place, let us proceed to examine the subject at large. I only thought it desirable that we should start with a right understanding of the passage, before we attempted to consider in detail the teaching contained in it.

I.—Our Lord is drawing a contrast between Himself and a certain class in the community, whom He denominates “hirelings.” He means by the phrase the persons who undertake the religious instruction and supervision of others—not from a sincere desire to benefit their fellow-men by leading them to God, but for the sake of the emolument, or honour, or influence, or power, which the possession of the office is found to confer on themselves. These men, he says, when any danger threatens the flock which has been entrusted to them, will be sure to beat ignominious retreat. They care for nothing but their own interest and their own comfort. They are not in any true or real way connected with the sheep of the flock; and this being the case, it is only to be expected that, when the wolf comes, their impulse will be to provide for their own security, and they will inevitably flee away, leaving the flock to its fate. On the other hand, the good shepherd will stand forth in defence of his charge when the enemy approaches, and, if need be, will perish at his post. All this, brethren, is intelligible enough. In the “wolf” we have the teachers of religious error, who sometimes creep into the bosom of a Christian Church, bringing spiritual ruin with them; or the bitter persecutions which every now

and then come down like a tornado upon it, sweeping away before the blast the herd of feeble and unstable disciples; and then, behind these, we have as the author and originator of them all, the dark, foul, malignant, evil spirit—Satan, the adversary, the unrelenting foe of God and man. And in the “good shepherd” we have—first of all, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself; and, next to Him (though at an infinite distance from Him), the host of teachers and preachers, whom He has inspired with His Spirit, and called by His grace, and sent forth to do His work in the world—the gracious and loving work of seeking and saving those that are lost.

But intelligible as the expression “good shepherd” is, it is worth while expending a few sentences of closer explanation upon it. The word usually employed in this connection in the Gospel of St. John is the word “true.” Jesus, says the Apostle, is the “true” light; and Jesus says of Himself “I am the true vine”; and again, “I am the true bread,” or rather, “My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.” You take the meaning, brethren; true is not here the opposite of false. It does not point to veracity. It signifies “real”—the thing symbolised rather than the symbol—the substance and not the shadow; and we are to understand by the language just quoted, that whatever qualities and powers are represented by “light,” and “bread,” and “vine”—are to be found realised, and embodied, and exhibited in their fullest development and perfection in the Lord Jesus Christ. In the present instance the Lord departs from His usual custom, and instead of the word “true,” employs “good” or “noble”—as perhaps it might be rendered. And why? Probably

because He wished to convey the idea of attractive moral loveliness, which is implied in the character of the shepherd which giveth his life for the sheep ; and because he wished to remind us of the appeal which that character makes to the latent generosity of the human heart. The phrase "true light" suggests that all the knowledge of God that exists in the world, or has existed in bygone days, flows as from a fountain from Christ Himself. We talk of conscience, and reason, and tradition, and the profound thoughts of great thinkers ; right enough ; but, after all Christ is the real source, whether in heathen or in Christian lands, of all that men have learnt or understood about the Deity. "That was the true light, that lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

And again, it is well to be reminded that, as the branch depends upon the tree for its life and its fruitfulness, and if severed from the tree would soon wither and die—so we draw our spiritual life from a vital connection with the personal Jesus Christ, and apart from Him could accomplish nothing. And yet once more, a most valuable field of thought is opened to us when we are led to contemplate, under the imagery of the Bread of Life, that mysterious but most true incorporation, by which Christ constitutes Himself the food of our souls—becomes part of us, dwells in us, and we dwell in Him. For all these things we are thankful—most thankful : for the spiritual illumination, for the supply of life, for the nourishment of our souls ; but I think I am right in saying that they do not touch us so deeply, do not call out so readily the response of our admiration and our love, as the recollection that our Good Shepherd went to the extreme length of laying down His life for the sheep. It is *then*,

brethren, that we begin to feel what a magnetic power there is about the character of Jesus Christ. If we are capable of being attracted by the charm of self-sacrifice and the grandeur of heroism ; by the beauty of a perfect purity of motive ; by the lofty enthusiasm which devotes all its energies with unfaltering earnestness to some noble cause, and which combines immovable firmness of loyalty to that which is right with the tenderest compassion, and the most loving sympathy for every member of the human family : if, brethren, we are capable of this—and who amongst us is not?—the influence over us of the personality of Christ, when it is rightly seen and understood—will be absolutely irresistible. It was so with St. Paul. He felt himself constrained, driven by his love to Christ, shut up, in fact, without the possibility of choice—to that course of resolute, untiring self-surrender which has made his career the admiration of the world.

II.—Let us advance now to the second clause of the text, and consider the knowledge which Christ has of His people, and His people have of Him. Now, to us—I suppose to all of us—there is something exceedingly monotonous about a flock of sheep. Each animal looks exactly like its neighbour—the face, the fleece, the shape, even the very size, being, as far as we can see, the same in all. But to the shepherd of the sheep—if he be skilful and experienced—the case is very different. He individualises the creatures under his care ; and he will tell you that there is as much difference in the features of his sheep as there is in the features of human beings, as much difference in their characters and tempers as there is in the characters and tempers of the people of his acquaintance : and he studies and

knows them all. Such a precise and intimate knowledge (but on an infinitely larger scale) has the Lord Jesus Christ of us, His disciples. We contemplate our fellow-men in the mass. There is the congregation, the parish, the city, the county, the nation ; but our individual acquaintance with one another is very slight. Indeed, we are, to a great extent, closed volumes—even to those who know and love us best. But everything in us and about us lies open to the Omniscient Christ. From Him no secrets are hid. He treads the pathways of the inmost recesses of our souls. He knows every twist and turn, every nook and corner, in which our thoughts are likely to lurk. He has followed us step by step in our past history. He observes our present movements. He is tracking us onward as we pass out into the unknown future.

And well for us, brethren, is it that it should be so. For it is an eye of watchful love, of tender solicitude, that is bending its glance upon us ; and Christ's perfect and unerring acquaintance with everything that concerns us, enables Him to suit His various dealings, with the most perfect and unerring accuracy, to our special necessities. But is this what is meant by the Saviour's language in the text? Yes ; partly so—but only partly so. There is a deeper meaning behind. The knowledge spoken of is (as you will observe) a *mutual* knowledge. It is not a mere barren, intellectual acquaintance of two persons with one another ; but it is the heart-intimacy of two attached and loving friends. There is understanding and sympathy : perfect on the one side, imperfect, but advancing and increasing, on the other. Christ knows us with the knowledge of love and complacency. He delights in His people.

He sees in them the outcome of His own work, the reflection of His own character : and we, on our side, enter, if it be only a little way, into the secret mystery of His divine love for us, find Him in prayer, find Him in the Word, find Him at the Holy Table, find Him in the various experiences and vicissitudes of our earthly career ; hold interchange of thought and feeling with Him ; and, as time advances, recognise in Him, the Spirit helping us, not only our Saviour, Teacher, Priest, and King, but also our tender and true Companion and Friend in the journey of life. Yes, brethren, the religion of Jesus Christ is a mutual thing (if I may so say)—a thing that involves an interchange between Christ and the human soul.

But there is yet another step for us to take, before we arrive at the full meaning of this part of our subject. The language of the passage points to the relation that exists between the Divine Father and the Divine Son. That relation, of course, is one of love—of love infinite and unspeakable. Knowing ourselves what love is, we can form some conception—and we are clearly intended to form some conception—of the love of the Father for the Son, and of the Son for the Father ; but we know very little. The feeling of affection which we experience, and which constitutes the chief happiness of our human life, is, after all only like a single ray of light flowing from the vast orb that shines down upon us from the sky : and when we are speaking upon the subject, it becomes us to proceed with the utmost reverence and caution. This mutual love between the Father and the Son implies a perfect understanding of each other, and a perfect sympathy. There is not—there cannot be—the shadow of a difference arising

between these two divine persons. There is not—there cannot be—a thought or a feeling in the one, that is not entered into and shared by the other. Now, observe that the Saviour, in the passage before us, makes a comparison between this divine love, and the love which exists between Him and His people. There is a correspondence, a parallelism. As the Father loves the Son—so does the Son love His people. As the Son loves the Father—so do Christ's people love Christ. The first statement, brethren, is fairly intelligible. The second can only become so by our remembering that the eye of Christ is fixed rather upon what ought to be, than what is ; rather upon the glories of the future state, when we shall know even as we are known, than upon the feebleness and imperfection of the present.

But this is not all. Between the two persons of the Godhead—the Father and the Son—there is not only the relation of love, but there is also the community of nature. "I and My Father are one," says Christ. And we are given to understand by the statement of our text that something of the same kind exists between Christ and His people. Not only a mutual affection, then, but a bond of life, which welds the two into one—is to be recognised by those who understand the true Christian position. The thought is wonderful ; and yet it is in accordance with the invariable teaching of the Lord. Our religion is not a mere question of imitation and obedience—imitation of the example of Christ, obedience to his precepts (important as these things are), but it starts from a vital connection with the personal Saviour, brought about and sustained by the Holy Spirit, by virtue of which we are one with Christ, and Christ one with us. In fact, Christ took our nature, that we

might afterwards receive His ; and thus has He made us (as St. Peter says) “partakers of the divine nature.” There is something of God in the true disciple—something now, more hereafter. Understand me, brethren—not mere likeness to God, not mere love to God, not mere devotion to God—but something of the nature of God ; and with this agree our Lord’s own words, in His High-Priestly prayer—“and the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them ; that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them, and they in Me—that they may be made perfect in one ; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them as Thou hast loved Me.”

III.—There remains yet another part of our subject to be discussed—the dying of the good shepherd for His sheep : but my time is exhausted, and I must not venture to touch it. I will only remind you, in conclusion, of what I have already hinted at, that there is a difference (in one way) between the knowledge that Christ has of His people, and the knowledge that His people have of Christ. The knowledge—you see what a comprehensive word that is?—the knowledge of Christ is perfect ; He cannot love us more than He does now. His love is infinite—it passeth knowledge. He cannot sympathise with us more tenderly ; He cannot understand us more fully—than He does at the present moment. In His case there is no possibility of advance and progress. With us it is not so : our knowledge is imperfect. It is *true*, brethren—in its form of love, of sympathy, of mutual understanding, all based upon vital union with Christ, all connected with our participation in His nature—but how little of it there is ! And so, if we are conscious of our imperfections, and wish

to be better—our aim will be not to rest satisfied with present attainments, but to become (God helping us) more deeply, more fully acquainted with the Lord Jesus Christ, in the wonder of His person, and in the greatness of His redeeming work. The subject will grow upon us, in interest and power, as we study it. The effect will be seen in our lives. It is by contemplation of Christ, brethren, that we become Christlike. More knowing leads on to more knowing; and more knowing to better doing. “We all with open face beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”



XXXVII.

THE RISEN CHRIST.

“And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as one dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not : I am the first and the last, and the Living one : and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore : and I have the keys of death and of Hades.”—
REV. i. 17, 18 (Revised Version).

WHEN we last met together in this church—just two days ago—we contemplated the Lord Jesus Christ in His state of humiliation. It was a sad and a distressing sight. There, before us, was the most loving, the most tender, the most gentle, the most pure of the sons of men hurried from one tribunal to another ; the sport of every coarse and heartless ruffian who chose to insult Him ; scourged, smitten on the cheek, spitted upon ; and then dragged, half-fainting, up to a little eminence outside the walls of Jerusalem, and nailed to a cross, and left there to die in shame and agony between two thieves. But all that has passed away. Now we behold Him in His resurrection-glory, in that blaze of insufferable splendour which caused even the beloved disciple—the man whom, above all others, He honoured with His friendship—to fall down before Him as one that was dead. What a contrast it is, brethren ! But it was to be expected. We must not suppose that the

Christ of the Gospel is one person, and the Christ of the Apocalypse is another. The truth is, that the first condition leads of necessity on to the second. The glory is the result of the humiliation. Even as St. Paul tells us, "Because Christ Jesus was obedient unto death—even the death of the cross—therefore God had highly exalted Him, and given Him a name that is above every name."

Now, it is the exalted Christ who is before us, on this bright Easter-day. Let us consider what is said about Him—not only in the text, but also in the entire passage to which the text belongs.

I.—First, then, *the description given*. Now, unless I am much mistaken, we are not to suppose that the figure of Jesus Christ, which the Apostle tells us he beheld, is precisely the figure of the Lord as He appears at this moment in the kingdom of heaven. What Saul saw when he fell from his horse on the road to Damascus; what the first martyr, Stephen, saw just before his furious enemies flew at him, and dragged him away to his death—was, I venture to believe, Jesus Christ as you and I should behold Him if our eyes were opened—Jesus Christ as He is. But the figure in St. John's description is evidently symbolical. You cannot realise it, and it is well not to attempt to do so. It ought to be left in our minds as a mental conception, without endeavouring to give it the definite expression of form. It represents Christ, but is not Christ—just as the seven golden candlesticks represent the seven churches of Asia, but are obviously not those churches; just as the circle of stars held in the hand of the Saviour stands for, and only stands for, the chief pastors of those Christian communities. And yet, on the other hand, there is a life,

a movement, a power about the figure, that seems to remove it from the region of mere symbolism. We have speech, we have the laying-on of the right hand, we have the penetrating glance of the eye. So that, to tell you the truth, one is a little perplexed as to the real nature of the vision, and hardly knows what to think or to say about it. However, this is clear enough, that we are intended to gather from the vision facts of the deepest importance, both about the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and about His present management of the Church. Here we have no difficulty.

From the appearance of Christ we learn what He is now. In the long white garment, reaching far down the person, and just displaying the feet; and in the broad golden girdle, the symbol of royalty, bound round the breast—we have the picture of the Priest-King on His throne. Were it Christ the worker who was to be put before us, the girdle would be fastened round the loins. But now, the day of His warfare has been accomplished; His travail is over, and He is here, with the calm, leisurely movement of undisputed sovereignty, come amongst His subjects—come down into His household the Church—to see if His people are obeying or disobeying the commandments which He has given them. The whitened hair, although in man it betokens the failure of power through the advance of age, in this connection symbolises the great fact that Jesus is the Ancient of days—the mysterious Being, who is from everlasting to everlasting. Every other feature of the description bespeaks irresistible strength. And this may well be devoted, without danger of misunderstanding, to the representation of His eternity. His eyes are as lamps of fire. They penetrate into the inmost thoughts of men, and search out

their motives. His feet are like unto fine brass, glowing with heat as if they had just come out of a furnace, and indicating the invincible force with which He can tread down His foes, and consume them, as in a moment. His voice is like that strange sound of the distant sea, so deep and penetrating, so suggestive of a hidden power which nothing can resist. And His face shines with the radiance of the noontide sun when men turn away from it dazzled and blinded. Such is the description of Him whom the bearing of the cross has exalted to the wearing of the crown ; and who, in all the plenitude of His majesty and glory, is at the right hand of God, carrying out His mighty purposes, and ordering all things after the pleasure of His own will—King of kings and Lord of lords.

But just now, let it be observed, He is engaged in His work upon earth. He has come down to visit His servants. He walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, carefully examining each. He holds the stars in His right hand, to show the chief pastors that they are in His grasp, and cannot escape from it ; or to assure them that, being there, they are safe from the attack of foes. And the word of His mouth is like a sharp two-edged sword, with which He cuts away a man's sins, if he is willing to be severed from them ; or, on the other hand, cuts him down in his sins, if he is determined to keep them. And all this obviously points to very grave and important truths. It is no trifling matter, brethren, for a Christian community—say, such as our own—to be under the scrutiny of that awful eye, as it notes the work we have done, or left undone ; the opportunities we have seized or lost ; the sins we have been guilty of ; in fact, our general faithfulness or unfaithfulness

to the trust that has been reposed in us. The Lord knows everything about us. Each congregation stands out in its own individuality before His view. And (ought I not to say it?) it is an especially solemn matter for him to whom the spiritual superintendence of a congregation has been committed, to remember how closely he too lies under the superintendence of the Divine Master. You and I, brethren, act and react upon each other to an extent that, perhaps, is scarcely realised by any amongst us. My preaching tells for good or for harm. My influence tells for good or for harm. And you in your turn affect me. Were I a better man, you would be a better people. Were you a better people, I should be a better man. We are bound up together. It cannot but be so. And Christ sees all this, and marks it; and I think He would have us understand that, whilst the people are responsible for the fulfilment of their duty to Him, the responsibility of the pastor is something graver and more serious still.

Let us remember, however, that, to this terrible divine scrutiny there is the alleviation that it is a very loving and a very kindly one. Jesus comes amongst us—not for the purpose of detecting faults, and bringing us up to judgment; far from it; but animated with feelings of the tenderest and most affectionate concern for our highest welfare. When He appeared to St. John, you know what happened. The beloved disciple—His closest and dearest associate during His ministry upon earth; the man most like Himself in character and purity—falls prostrate at His feet, in an agony of alarm, the imperfectly-sanctified nature not being able to endure, without quailing, the presence of the awful holiness of God. But you know also what followed.

The right hand is stretched out, and laid upon the Apostle's person. Ah! it is the affectionate, gracious action which John saw when the leper was cleansed, and when the ear of the smitten Malchus was made whole again. It is the voice which he heard when the wild winds, tearing down through the gorges of the mountains, lashed the waves of the lake into fury, and broke over their frail vessel, and when the divine figure, half-seen in the dusk, went gliding by over a pathway in the waters that opened before it as it moved—"It is I. Be not afraid." And the well-known accents reassured him, for he felt that—in spite of all the dazzling glory, and of all the overwhelming splendour, it was his own loving Master in whose presence he stood—the Jesus of the eternal throne, it is true, but still, the Jesus of the walks on the breezy uplands of the Judæan hills; of the discussions by the shores of the Galilean lake; of the converse in the homely cottage when the day's work was over; the Jesus to whom every trouble could be taken, and every confidence unhesitatingly imparted; Jesus, his companion and his friend. So much for the description. Let us pass on now to the teaching of the text itself.

II.—"I am the first and the last," says Christ. The "first," because from Him all things proceed as from their origin; the "last," because towards Him—and to Him—all things tend, as to the purpose and object for which they are called into existence. It is impossible to conceive of a title more distinctly pointing to the peculiar prerogatives of Deity than this. Three times, in the prophecies of Isaiah, it is applied to Jehovah. Here Jesus Christ takes it to Himself. And He who is the source of all things, and the end of all things, cannot but be God. Next, "I am the Living

one," *i.e.*, "I alone have life in Myself; and from Me, as from a fountain, all created life flows." We are reminded of the words—"uncaused Himself, but causing all beside." "But though I am the Living one, I became dead—I passed through the valley of the shadow of death: death for a time had dominion over Me—even Me. But only for a time. I emerged from his gloomy dominions, and I am now alive, alive for evermore, subject to no more change; and I hold in My hands the keys of the dreaded kingdom of death and of Hades. 'I open, and none shall shut: I shut, and none shall open.'" The leading idea in the passage is obvious enough. The Lord tells us that through His death He has obtained the power to destroy death, and to confer life. Had He remained the "Living one" (as He was in the essence of His nature, from all eternity) and refused to taste of death—death would have reigned supreme over the children of men; there would have been no resurrection for us; there would have been no eternal life. As it is, He has obtained a victory in which His people participate. He hath made the dreaded king of terrors His servant and ours; and He has been invested with complete control over the awful kingdom of the unseen world.

But let us approach the subject a little more closely. That there is something terrible about death to a human being it is impossible to deny. You may say that it has its analogies in the world around us—in the ripened fruit, for instance, that drops from the bough; in the animal that reaches its maturity and then decays; and that therefore, to us, death is nothing more than a natural process through which we must expect to pass, and by means of which room is made for successive generations on the face of the earth. But all the

while that you so speak, there is an instinctive feeling within you that you have not given the whole account of the matter. And your instinctive feeling is right. There is something which differentiates the death of a human being from the death of every other creature, and *that something is sin*. "The sting of death is sin." Were sin away death might be faced (painful and distressing as it would be even then) with comparative indifference. Here, then, we put our finger on the real trouble of dissolution. We watch—let us say—over the sick bed of someone near and dear to us. It is a long, lingering, agonising illness. The tabernacle of life is taken down bit by bit, so slowly, so painfully, that we almost wish that the end were come—our natural reluctance to be severed from our friend, struggling with our distress for his protracted misery; and when at last the worn and tortured frame gives up its last breath, and lies still, we draw a sigh of relief (partly for his sake, partly for our own) and say—"Thank God! his troubles are over: he is at rest!" But, brethren—*apart from Christ* what right have we to say that "he is at rest?" Do not think me hard. I trust I am not. I know how natural affection prompts us to think well, to think the very best of the departed; and how we catch (rightly, I think) at the slightest indications that tend to make us believe that all is well with them. But the sad thought will come over me—that perhaps—perhaps—the mysterious future may only be a continuation in the same line of the state of things we have lately witnessed. "Why not?" says the stricken heart. "Why not? What do I know?" But here it is, brethren, that Jesus Christ comes in, and alters the whole aspect of affairs. He hath dealt with sin upon the cross, and put it away by the sacrifice of

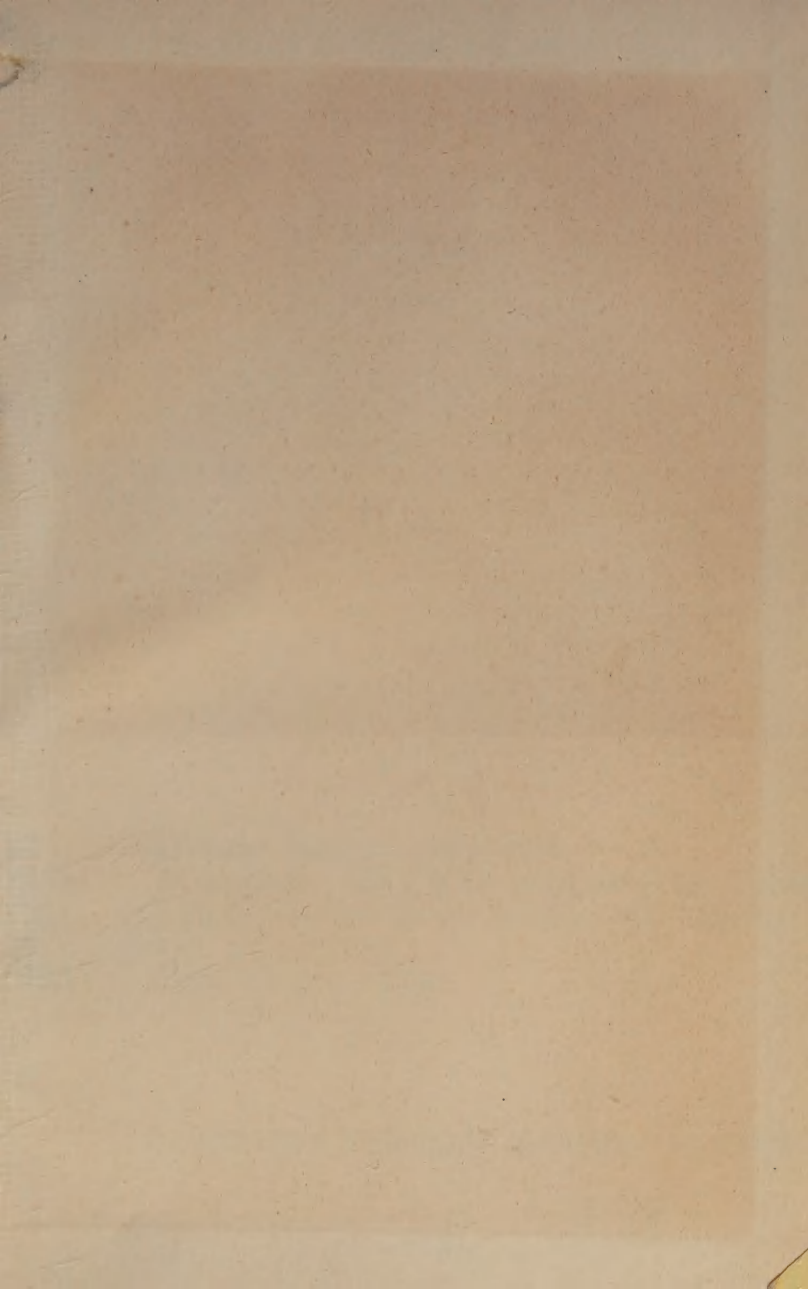
Himself. And now the sting is pulled out ; the horror of death is taken away. Its entire nature is changed. No longer the king of terrors ; no longer an enemy, Christ hath made him a servant of the believers—a servant grim indeed, and ungainly in his aspect, and seldom very welcome when he appears ; but still, sent to take the child of God from the struggle and the conflict, from the sins and sorrows of earth, to the eternal calm and peace of the Heavenly Father's home.

But Christ is not only the Lord of death—He is also the Lord of Hades. Hades—(not “ Hell,” as we have it in the Authorised Version)—Hades, before Christ appeared and accomplished His great redeeming work on earth, was an object of scarcely less aversion and dread than death itself. Men knew nothing of that dim, vast, shadowy, unseen region beyond the grave. They asked themselves—what were the conditions of existence into which they would be ushered ? what the companionships they should find there ? what the occupations in which they should be engaged ? what the effect of their residence in that dark abode ? But they found no answer. No one, out of all the millions that had left the earth, had ever come back to tell them. But, again, Christ altered this. And now, we know and are sure that His people pass, when they pass behind the veil, into the society of the blessed dead who have died in the Lord, and into a more blessed proximity to Christ than any that they could possibly have enjoyed whilst living here below. Of course, they are with Christ now, and Christ with them. But in a far higher sense will they be “ with Christ ” when they go hence, and are no more seen.

And yet once more. Christ not only takes His people into the unseen world, and provides for their well-being and happiness whilst there; but also, when the time has come, brings them up triumphantly out of it. | The vast realm of Hades—wherever it is—is one of calm and quiet. The inhabitants of it “rest from their labours.” No winds of temptation ruffle the surface of their souls. There is no sin, no sorrow, no trial there. But there is keen expectation of that which is coming. The blessed dead—happy though they be—are waiting for still greater happiness: waiting for the bright dawn of the Day of the Resurrection; for then (as they know), when Christ, who is their life, shall appear, then shall they also appear with Him in glory. Thus, brethren, by His sacrifice offered on the cross; and by the power of the resurrection which followed it—the Lord Jesus Christ has obtained perfect authority over death and Hades, and makes His people partakers of the victory which He hath won for Himself. Such is one of the brightest lessons of this brightest festival of the Christian Church.

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